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# A CHILD OF NATURE.

A Romance.

BY  
ROBERT BUCHANAN,  
AUTHOR OF 'THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. III.

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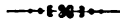
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# A CHILD OF NATURE.



## CHAPTER I.

### GRAHAM TO THE RESCUE.

**T**HERE was a roar like cannon thundering in her ears—then a crash, a whirl—followed by semi-stupor. The water had reached up its wild hands and caught her, dragging her to its heart, then with fierce lips sucking her closer and closer. She could not scream now, her

brain could not even realise the peril, or comprehend the situation; only she felt herself whirling along in a dream, and was conscious of nothing else but a strange sound; not thunder now, but like the ringing of bells.

The very fury of the torrent prevented her from sinking below its surface, and her garments, inflated from beneath, helped to support her. Loose as a weed torn from its hold in the ground or in the rock, her hair washing wild and dripping, her arms outreaching—half sinking, half supported, she was driven along for nearly fifty yards.

Here the rapid river, shooting out of the riven rock, and from out the shelter of the overhanging woods, suddenly broadened, and ran with slower pace, but still swiftly,

out into the open sunlight; and here its hold loosening, like fingers that relax their tension from sheer exhaustion, the girl began to sink and drown. Beating the water with convulsive hands, she sank, and touched the bottom for the first time. Then she rose again, and, though scarcely conscious, uttered a convulsive cry.

As she did so, a man appeared upon the bank above her, and without an instant's hesitation leapt down into the water. Striking out with powerful arms, he reached her just as she was about to sink for the second time.

Quite unconscious now, she did not see him, or attempt to clutch him; while with infinite gentleness he drew her backward, and swimming beneath her, paddled rapidly

to shore. Touching ground, he gained his feet, and then with a sense of horrible rapture, almost of exultation, he seized her in his strong arms and waded to the bank.

They made a subject for a painter as they paused there on the brink, with the wild river running past them, and the sun shining above their heads; she, dripping and lifeless, her hair hanging loose, her delicate dress soddened, destroyed, and half torn from her tender body; he, strong and determined, dripping too, but careless of his condition, with his eyes fixed passionately and fearfully on the pallid, death-like face.

He paused only for a moment, then, with his light burden in his arms, he leapt up the bank, and stood knee-deep in heather.

There was a heathery knoll here, and to this he ran, and set his burden down. Then with a sickening dread he knelt beside her, and looked into her face.

To all seeming she was dead. Her eyes were fixed, her breath seemed no longer to go and come; she lay like death. With a wild cry he threw his arms around her, and in the insolence of despair pressed her to his breast. She did not stir.

Then a thought struck him, and with tremulous fingers he tore open the bosom of her oozy dress, and placed his hand upon her heart. To his surprise and joy he could faintly but distinctly feel it stirring beneath his touch. A heavy sigh, almost a sob, broke from his lips, and the tears rose in his eyes.

But he was a true son of the sea, and this

was not the first occasion on which he had snatched life from the destructive jaws of water. So he began, deliberately and gently, to move the arms of the sleeping girl, raising them with one steady motion over her head, then bringing them down with soft and steady pressure to her side, thus, on the principle of the bellows, inflating the delicate lungs with air, and filling the tender cells with new life. It was tedious work, and the moments seemed minutes, the minutes interminable, as he repeated the motion, and watched wildly for signs of returning animation.


She still remained cold and inert, and at last he bethought him of a plan he had more than once seen tried with success. Placing her on her side, he knelt down beside her, and still repeated the rhythmic

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motion of the arms, and placed his mouth to her cold lips. Drawing a deep breath he suffered the strong breathing to pass into her mouth. Thus their breaths, their very lives, mingled for the time being, and now, as if in response to the burning life within his veins, her own faint life began to stir.

There was a convulsive movement of the breast, a shiver of the entire frame, then the breath began to come.

Graham Macdonald would have given the world at that moment for a few drops of brandy, or some other revivifying fluid. Failing that, he persisted in the rhythmic movement of the arms, and kept the dying body close against his own. Fortunately the sky had cleared, and it was now one of those burning days to be known only in





the brief summer of the far north. The air was full of warmth and life.

The slow minutes passed, until at last she opened her eyes!

There was a film upon them, and at first she saw nothing. Graham was now stooping over her, convulsively holding her hand.

He could not utter a word, for now, to see her breathing again, fresh from the shadow of a cruel death, he was choking with tears.

She heaved a heavy sigh, closed her eyes, and after a pause opened them again. This time she recognised the form bending over her, and a look of frightened recognition came into her face.

‘ Help me to rise,’ she said faintly.

He put his arm around her, and lifted

her to her feet. She trembled and shivered, and to his delight clung to him.

‘What has happened?’ she said, with a frightened sob.

‘You fell into the river—you were drowning; but luckily I was near.’

She gazed at him with tearful eyes, and did not seem to understand; then again, as if involuntarily, she clung to him, with a touch that made him tremble through and through.

‘Take me home,’ she said.

‘May I carry you?’ he asked quickly.

She did not answer, so, without another word, he lifted her up, and began walking with great strides in the direction of Glenheather Lodge. Exalted by the strong stress of his passionate pity, he felt her weight no more than if it had been a feather.

All he felt now was a sullen rapture, a gloomy joy. It was something, at least, to hold her in his arms, to feel her wet, wild hair against his cheek, to be conscious, above all, that she owed her life to him, and that, whatever might come between them in the future, she was in a measure, and for the time being, wholly his. Yes, that triumph, temporary though it was, was worth living and dying for. It seemed as if he had never rightly lived till that moment ; and, as he strode along, with heart of fire and sinews of iron, he felt the moment was sublime.

He walked some distance in silence, very rapidly.

He was bareheaded, and the sun poured its rays down with violence, but he did not feel them, though his face was like

fire, and the great veins of his forehead were swollen and enlarged.

Suddenly she fluttered in his arms, and cried to be set down.

He obeyed her in a moment, and, setting her down, stood flushed and tremulous before her.

‘I think I can walk,’ she said. ‘Please give me your arm.’

He moved near to her, and, leaning upon him, she stepped feebly forward; but she was shivering, and her strength seemed very small. All at once she uttered a cry, and would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms.

By this time they had gained the summit of a small hill, and could see, far away in the distance, the white walls of Glenheather Lodge.

‘Let me sit down!’ she cried; and shivered violently.

He placed her gently on the ground, and bent over her.

‘If you will wait here,’ he said, ‘I will run to the lodge and get you a little brandy. You are faint and cold, and that will be the best. May I go?’

She inclined her head, and, without even looking at her, he ran down the hill. Love appeared to give him wings, and he leapt from knoll to knoll as nimbly as a deer. Pausing at the foot of the hill, with the open moor before him, he saw the figure of Ethel still sitting moveless on the height. Then he ran on.

The lodge was a good mile away, but the mile was as nothing to the young mountaineer. Before many minutes had passed

he stood panting before the house. A couple of Gordon setters were basking upon the threshold, and an empty garden-chair stood in the sun. The door stood wide open, and without a moment's hesitation, not pausing to knock, he entered.

In the lobby he came face to face with Sir Charles Sedley.

'Hullo!' cried that nobleman, aghast at the intrusion.

'There is not a moment to lose!' cried Graham. 'Give me some brandy.'

Sir Charles, rendered still more aghast by the extraordinary request, positively gasped with amazement.

'Brandy!' he echoed.

'Yes, at once—for your daughter.'

'For my daughter!'

'Yes, she is ill—she has met with

an accident. I must have brandy at once.'

'When? how? where?' Sir Charles began categorically; but Graham, with decision, proceeded:

'It is no time for talk. Miss Sedley is still in a fainting condition. For God's sake get me the brandy!'

Thus conjured, Sir Charles ran into the dining-room and seized a spirit bottle and a glass. He trembled very much, for he was very fond of his daughter, and looked quite pale.

'Where is she?' he cried, rejoining Graham.

'Follow me!'

Taking glass and bottle from the baronet's hand, he ran from the house and hurried rapidly back across the moor. Sir Charles,

snatching a cap up to cover his head, followed slowly in his track, silent, dumb-stricken, and amazed.

When Graham reached Miss Sedley's side he found her just as he had left her, but quite conscious now, and shivering violently.

He pressed the brandy upon her, and she drank part of a glass without water—her first experience of raw spirits in her life. The effect was almost instantaneous, and by the time her father came up the dulness of her eyes and spectral pallor of her face had almost passed away.

‘God bless me, Ethel, my darling, what's this?’ cried the baronet, bending down and kissing her, while he seized her hands between his own.

‘I scarcely know,’ she said faintly. ‘I—



I think I fell into the water, and that gentleman pulled me out.'

'And you're dripping wet! This is horrible. You fell into the water! What water?'

'Into the river,' answered Graham, with one of his gloomy looks. 'The Devil's Bridge gave way beneath her, and she sank into the river at full flood.'

'Good God! is it possible?'

Greatly agitated, Sir Charles gazed from his daughter to Graham, and from Graham to his daughter, and perceived their forlorn appearance and their dripping attire. Inspiration came to him at last, and he exclaimed,

'Take a little more brandy, my love.'

Graham stepped forward with the bottle, but she shook her head.

‘ You have taken none yourself,’ she said, lifting her eyes to his face. ‘ You must be very cold.’

Graham smiled, and, pouring out a glass of the raw fluid, drank it off with perfect unconcern. Then he turned to Sir Charles.

‘ The young lady is soaking,’ he said. ‘ The sooner she is taken home the better.’

‘ Dear me, yes!’ ejaculated Sir Charles. ‘ Can you walk, Ethel?’

‘ I will try, papa,’ was the answer. ‘ I feel stronger now.’

So saying she arose, and, leaning on her father’s arm, began moving slowly in the direction of the lodge. Macdonald followed close behind, ready at any moment to spring forward and offer assistance ; but already, as it seemed to him, his time of triumph was over, and she had passed out of the

sphere of his passion. That time, despite all its peril for her, had been supreme for him, and holding her in his arms as he swam to shore, or clasping her wet form to his heart in the wild hope of restoring animation, he would thankfully have died. It was all over now. Never again perhaps would he be privileged to hold her in his embrace, to drink her breath, to feel the ecstasy of adoring, yet despairing, possession. Already, too, she seemed a different being. In her face as it was turned to her father, then to him, and in her slight form, as she quietly moved along on her father's arm, the old unconscious hauteur, the easy pride which he resented so much, but which made him admire her twenty-fold, was beginning to return. As he followed, it seemed that he had lost her. She had

been his for an instant, she was his no more.

Still shivering violently, yet recovering some little of her habitual self-command, she made her way across the moor, and at last she reached the door. There she paused for a moment, and, turning on the threshold, quietly reached out her hand to Graham. He took it, and on a sudden impulse was about to kiss it, when he felt the cold eye of Sir Charles fixed upon him; and so, instead of kissing it, he pressed it warmly. She did not smile, but was deathly pale, as, turning away, she entered the house, and, calling for the female attendant, went upstairs to her room.

Sir Charles turned to Graham.

‘I won’t ask you to come in,’ he said, ‘for you are dripping wet. Stop, though!’

Suppose you change here, and put on some dry things of mine.'

Graham laughed.

'Thank you,' he said, 'I'm warm already. It's not the first cold bath I've taken in my clothes.'

'But you'll get your death of cold.'

'Is it *me*?' returned Graham, with a shrug of contempt.

'Then take some more brandy. No. A cigar?'

The cigar Graham accepted, and lit it quietly. As he did so, the baronet looked at him keenly, and said:

'How did this happen? It seems a most extraordinary occurrence. I've passed over that bridge a dozen times, and it never gave way. What a miracle it was my child escaped!'

‘Yes, it was a miracle,’ returned Graham in a low voice, and the next minute he walked away.

Instead of turning homeward, Graham Macdonald walked rapidly in the direction of the Devil’s Bridge.

His physical condition was entirely forgotten, and he heeded his wet garments neither more nor less than the warm air that hung about him. His brow was black, his teeth set together, in the agony of a new fear which the words of Sir Charles Sedley had conjured up.

Running rather than walking, he approached the mountains, and was soon in the close vicinity of the Devil’s Bridge.

Pausing on the river’s side, he saw the water still boiling and seething, the very

banks seeming to shake with the force and fury of the flood.

Then he passed upward and followed the path which led to the bridge. Passing along amidst the trees, he came to the chasm where the bridge had hung, but the bridge was gone.

One of the upper ropes still hung in the air, and part of a plank jutted out from the opposite side ; the rest of the frail structure had disappeared.

Stooping down, and resting on his hands and knees, he carefully examined the side of the chasm on which he himself was standing. In another minute he sprang up, and, with a wild gesture, threw his arms into the air. His face had turned perfectly livid and bloodless, and he uttered an exclamation of horror.

The cause of his horror was simple, and may be at once explained. The portion of wood jutting out from the bank on which he stood was not jagged, broken, or worm-eaten ; it was clean cut, as if with some keen instrument, and showed the marks of heavy blows, like those of a sharp axe!

It was terrible, inconceivable, in its suggestion of human handiwork. His head swam round.

As he stood in horrible surprise and doubt, his eyes looked down the river towards the spot near which he had saved Miss Sedley's life, and he discerned in the distance something moveless as a rock, but resembling the figure of a man.

Silently, not hesitating a moment, he moved in that direction, his hands closing and unclosing rapidly in the fury of his



thought. Pushing his way through the intervening branches of the wood, he came out on an open space, and saw, standing with its back to him, the shape of his foster-father.





## CHAPTER II.

### KOLL'S AXE.

**T**HE old man did not hear his approach, for the river was loud, and he himself was busy with his own thoughts ; but, striding forward white and ghastly, Graham placed his hand upon his shoulder.

Koll turned, and saw in a moment, by the expression of the young man's face, that his secret was discovered. His own countenance, however, assumed a cunning expression of surprise.

‘What are you doing here?’ cried Graham, in a choking voice.

‘She is looking at the river,’ answered Koll, quietly. ‘Weel, it will be a grand flood for the salmon, and there will be goot fishing when the water begins to faal!’

Before he could say another word, Graham’s fingers were at his throat.

‘I will strangle you,’ he cried, ‘if you do not tell me the truth! Who cut down the bridge? You?’

‘The bridge? And wha would cut doon the bridge? Is it Koll?’

‘Some one has cut the planks with an axe, and the rope was almost severed with a knife. It was *you*. You old devil! why did you do it? Tell me quickly, Koll, or I shall strike you. Yes or no? Was it your work?’

As he spoke the young man saw something in the grass at his feet. He stooped and lifted it. It was a common axe, or chopper, and sharp as a knife.

With a cry he held it in the air.

'Yes, it was *you!* Why did you do it, why? Speak, or I'll kill you!'

Koll Nicholson stood firm, and with his still lack-lustre eyes looked at Graham. Then he drew himself up quietly and replied :

'She will tell you why she did it—she will tell you, and she doesna care if you kill her. It was to droon the wicked witch.'

'To—what?'

'To droon the tamned witch wha has broken the heart of her bairn.'

'What do you mean?' cried Graham, glaring at the old man, and dropping the

arm which held the axe. 'You tried to murder that lady?'

'She tried to droon the witch, and she would have droon'd her if she had her will!'

Utter horror and amazement paralysed Graham's faculties for a time, while the old man continued calmly :

'Dinna blame her, Graham—it was best that the witch should dee. And what for did you jump into the river and sweem to her, and bring her back again to land? It was not goot, it was better that the witch should droon, and then the old man's wish would come aboot, and Mina would be Leddy Arranmore.'

Then in a flash all the old man's purpose dawned upon the mind of Graham, and he went aghast at the deliberate and cold-blooded malignity. Shrinking back, he

gazed upon the tall form of his foster-father with the uttermost horror and repulsion, amounting in the sum to positive hate. He could not speak at first, but his face spoke for him, and Koll saw there something appalling even to his phlegmatic nature.

‘What ails her son?’ he said, beginning to tremble, and putting into his voice a certain pathetic whine. ‘What for is he angry with Koll? It is goot that the witch should droon.’

‘It is well for you, Koll Nicholson,’ cried Graham, ‘that your devilish purpose failed, and that the lady’s life was saved. Mind this, too! If one hair of her head suffers I will have justice upon you; I will drag you to prison with my own hands. Even as it is, your attempt at murder shall be known; and, if it is proved upon you, you will end

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your days in gaol. You did not succeed, but that is no fault of yours, and you are as guilty as if you had succeeded. From this moment never speak to me again. My uncle and my sister shall know what you have done, and they will loathe you as I loathe you, curse you as I curse you, for your devilish deed.'

Unconsciously Graham had touched the right chord at last. The old man fell upon his knees, and held him with his quivering hand.

'Kill her!' he cried. 'But dinna tell Mina—dinna tell her bairn!'

'Let me go. I will tell her, and she will never forgive you.'

'She did it for her foster-bairn,' whimpered the old man. 'She tried to droon the witch for her bairn's sake—for her bairn

was like to dee, and Koll saw nae other way. But dinna speak to Mina—dinna turn Mina's heart against Koll. Take the sharp axe and kill the old man with the axe, but dinna, dinna tell her foster-bairn.'

Graham looked down at Koll with intense loathing; then, struck by a new thought, he exclaimed :

'I will tell her, and she will not pity you. She is a good lass, and would hate a murderer. But mind this—I am your worst enemy from this night. Your talk is all of Mina, but what did you think about *me*, about what *I* suffer? If you were not an old devil, blind and deaf, you would have known how much I care for Miss Sedley—you would have known that I would die for her, I love her so much. She is an angel, and you are an old devil.



When I think that you dared to lift your hand against her, when I think she might have died a violent death through your infernal plot, I feel ready to revenge myself upon you. I wish my curse could kill you! Let go of me; never dare to speak to me or to my sister again!

Tears were now running down the ash-grey cheeks of Koll, the great frame trembled like a leaf, while, seizing the hand of Graham and lifting it to his lips, he covered it with kisses, moaning and whimpering all the time like a hound in disgrace.

‘Graham,’ he cried, ‘Graham, her ain son! dinna be sae hard on Koll. She didna ken you was coorting the leddy—she didna ken you were to marry her—she thought she was to marry the Laird of Arranmore.’

‘Marry her?’ echoed Graham, angrily. ‘I tell you she is an angel, and I am not fit to tie her shoe-strings. But I love her, for all that.’

‘And you are coorting the leddy—oh, why did ye no tell Koll you was coorting the leddy? She didna ken, she didna ken.’

Graham stamped upon the ground, and shook off the old man’s grasp in the very fierceness of his anger.

‘Fool! are you so blind that you cannot see the difference between a great lady like that and a wretched Highlander like me? I am as much below her as you are below her—aye, as the dirt beneath her bonnie feet.’

Koll rose to his feet with a look of pride and determination.

‘Her son is a Macdonald of the Isles,’ he said proudly, ‘and the Macdonalds of the Isles are dirt beneath nae folk’s feet.’

‘And what are you,’ continued Graham, savagely, ‘to meddle with my business? How dare you pry, and watch, and plot against me, and try to injure the only creature I care for in the world? You meddling, murdering devil! And you dare to tell me it was for my sister’s sake! It is a lie. You care no more for my sister than you care for me. You care only for yourself. If I had my will upon you, Koll Nicholson, I would have you hung!’

So saying, Graham shook off the old man’s clutch, and, still tremulous with passion, walked away. Koll stood on the same spot, watching him go, until he disappeared across the darkening moor. Then

the old man stooped and lifted the axe, which Graham had cast furiously upon the ground.

'She doesna care if they hang her,' he muttered. 'If the heart of her bairn is turned against her, she would like to dee ; but, whether they hang her or no, it's maybe better to fling the axe awa'.'

And, walking to the bank, he dropped the axe into the deepest part of the river, where it sank at once. Then, with a deep groan of pain, which was repeated at long intervals, and seemed to come from the very depths of his heart, he made his way across the moor.





## CHAPTER III.

### THE DARKENING OF THE DREAM.

**B**EFORE returning to the village Graham Macdonald called again at Glenheather Lodge, and ascertained that Miss Sedley was warm in bed, and showed as yet no signs of serious illness. He did not see Sir Charles, who was just then sitting by his daughter's bedside, but was assured by the old female domestic that no danger was to be apprehended. Satisfied on this point, he made his way

homeward, with such a fever in his heart and brain as he had scarcely ever felt before in all his life.

The more he reflected on the proceedings of the day the more he felt bewildered and distraught. That Koll Nicholson, in the cold deliberation of his antipathy and jealousy, should actually have attempted to commit a diabolical murder, and in the carrying out of his plans should have adopted means so cunning, seemed less extraordinary than that he, Graham, should have been providentially at hand, willing and able to save the lady of his love from a watery grave. Well, whatever might be the issue, he had enjoyed for the time being a kind of savage happiness. He had been brought closer to his ideal that day than he could ever hope to come again. He had

breathed the very breath of his life into her mouth, and he had warmed her cold body against his heart. Then, recovering, she had clung to him as to a natural protector, temporarily forgetful of the pride of birth and worldly position which had hitherto come between them. He carried with him, tremulous in his heart, the memory of her last ghost-like gaze as she had offered him her hand. Yes, that day at least, he had lived indeed.

As he revolved the whole circumstances in his mind his wrath against his foster-father gradually lessened, and although he hated him for what he had done, he partly pardoned him because the issue had not been fatal, and because the event had given him so terribly sweet an experience.

He rapidly determined that he would say

nothing of Koll Nicholson's crime, though he would take care that it was punished by the silent repudiation of the family. To make any sort of accusation against Koll would be to lay bare his own heart, perhaps to make his own acts open to misconstruction. He resolved, therefore, that he would screen Koll, and even, until silence was impossible, say nothing whatever of the occurrence of the day.

Fortunately for his plans, he was able to reach his own room in the manse unobserved, and to change his wet attire, which he gave Janet to dry, strictly enjoining her to say nothing to anyone on the subject. Then strolling carelessly downstairs, he joined his uncle at the evening meal.

He hurried to bed early, but lay all night in an ecstasy of feverish remembrance.



Whenever he dozed off to sleep he was struggling again in the flood, with his unconscious burthen in his arms, and holding her locked in his despairing yet passionate embrace.

He rose at dawn, and, slipping on his clothes, wandered forth. A drizzling rain was falling, but he did not heed it. He walked up across the moor, till he came in sight of the lonely lodge, which still lay partially hidden in the slowly ascending mists of morning ; and he stood for an hour feasting his eyes upon it. The sun came up red and sullen, with strong streaks upon the clouded hills, and at last, with finger red as fire, touched the lodge and made it blood-red. He watched it till the red light melted into full morning, then he turned away.

His impulse led him towards the sea-shore, towards the spot where Koll Nicholson had placed his lonely hut. Approaching the door, which stood wide open, he saw the figure of the old man seated in its usual crouching position on a low stool before the fire. He entered in, and placed his hand upon Koll's shoulder. Koll looked up without the least surprise, and held out both his hands.

‘Listen to me,’ said Graham, coldly. ‘I have thought it over, and I shall say nothing about what you have done. If your guilt is discovered, it will be no fault of mine ; but, if I can, I shall keep the secret.’

‘And you will not tell her bairn?’

‘I will tell no one. Not because I can forgive you, but because I do not wish to

bring shame upon myself. You understand?’

‘She kens, she kens,’ said the fisherman, wearily shaking his head. ‘O Graham, her ain son, dinna be angry wi’ her!’

But Graham pushed back the trembling hands that were outstretched to his.

‘You must promise me, too. You must swear to me that you will never plan any such devilry again. Will you swear?’

‘She’ll swear!’

‘Never to attempt to harm that lady—always to remember that I love her, and that her life is dearer to me than my own.’

‘She’ll remember! she’ll remember!’ cried Koll, again reaching out his tremulous hands. But Graham again shook off his hold, and with one dark look of warning,

and no word of farewell, strode to the door and so disappeared.

The old man sat moveless before the slowly smouldering fire of peat, his hands expanded through old habit to feel the heat, his eyes upon the faint glow of the flame upon the ground. He had sat thus all night, until Graham disturbed him, and now he relapsed again into his old position. Pale and still, grim and great as some shape of granite, he sat, with the black walls round him, and the black roof above his head. Only now and then he muttered to himself, and shook his hoary head from side to side, as if in deep trouble. Hour after hour passed, and he did not stir.

Meantime the sun was well up over Uribol, and with the rising of the sun came the news of what had befallen Miss Sedley,

and of how she had been rescued from death by Graham Macdonald. If Graham had fancied that an affair so extraordinary could be kept a secret he was doomed to disappointment.

How or by whom it was spread no man knew—possibly it began with some kitchen gossip at the lodge; but before now every man and woman in the clachan knew all about it. Not but that the various accounts passing from mouth to mouth were contradictory and exaggerated. One feminine rumour ran that Graham and the great lady had then and there, immediately after the immersion, made a solemn covenant to marry each other. Another story went that Miss Sedley had wilfully flung herself into the water because she was unwilling to marry the young Lord of Arranmore. In short,

every possible flight of fancy was indulged in, with the news of the accident for a basis, and the affair was a godsend to every gossip for ten miles round.

When Graham walked in to breakfast he saw at once that the news had reached his uncle.

‘What’s this, Graham?’ said the minister, after waiting in vain to see if his nephew would broach the subject, ‘what’s this I hear? Is it true that Miss Sedley fell into the river, and that you swam in and brought her out?’

Graham, with heightened colour, hung his head over his cup of tea.

‘Yes, it’s true. It’s lucky I was at hand.’

‘I sincerely trust the young lady is not injured. The shock must have been ter-

rible to one so delicate. How did it happen?’

‘The Devil’s Bridge had been loosened by the rains; when she stepped upon it, it gave way beneath her feet.


‘Horrible!’ exclaimed the clergyman. ‘I always said it was not safe, and I never crossed it myself without feeling dizzy. And she fell, you say——’

‘Right down into Paol na Bedach gal. Fortunately the flood was high, and, instead of striking the rocks, she was swept down with the current.’

‘And she was not dangerously hurt?—a miracle!’

Graham smiled.

‘The water took her along like a feather, as if she was too delicate and bonnie to drown.’



‘Thank God you were there.’

‘Ay, thank God!’

The minister rose and took from the wall his broad-brimmed hat and shepherd’s crook.

‘I will go at once and call,’ he said.

‘Will you come with me?’

Graham shook his head.

‘I’m rather tired, and will stay at home till you come back.’

‘Very well,’ said Mr. Macdonald; ‘I shall not be long away, and I will bring you word how the young lady is this morning.’

The minister hurried away, and in less than two hours he returned, and found Graham sitting by the kitchen fire.

‘Well,’ said Graham, looking up nervously.

His uncle came over smiling and clapped him on the shoulder.



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‘Good news, Graham! The young lady is very little the worse, though a good deal shaken by the fright.’


‘Did you see her?’

‘No, she is keeping in bed, but I saw Sir Charles, and he spoke in the highest terms of *you*. He asked about your position, your prospects in life, and seemed very much interested indeed; said he should never forget that you had been of service to him, and offered to forward your worldly interests as far as lay in his power.’

‘Very kind,’ answered Graham with a scowl, ‘but I don’t want his assistance.’

‘Don’t make sure of that. He is a gentleman whose friendship is of the greatest possible value.’

‘What I did I did to please myself—not him.’



‘My dear Graham, you did what any Christian man would have done under the circumstances,’ responded Mr. Macdonald, warmly; ‘but God has enabled you to perform a deed of mercy, and we should all be grateful. It would have been horrible indeed if that bonnie young life had been lost. Even as it is, I am sorry they are leaving with such a gruesome memory of the Highlands.’

‘Leaving?’ repeated Graham.

‘Yes, Sir Charles has now decided to go at once. They will depart without delay; and Lord Arranmore will accompany them,’ he added. ‘I believe the marriage is to take place before Christmas.’

‘Whose marriage, uncle?’

‘Miss Sedley’s, of course, with Lord Arranmore. Sir Charles informs me that

their attachment dates from childhood. Well, Graham, you will have made another friend in his lordship. How grateful he will be to you for having preserved his bride!

Graham said nothing, but, with his face convulsed by agony, rose and left the house. Then he lit his pipe, and, pacing on the sea-shore, had his dark hour in silence.

As he gazed out upon the grey waters of the northern sea—cold, palpitating without sunlight—he saw a sail fading far under the horizon, and it seemed like a gloomy image of his love. He had had his supreme moment, but now he was to be left in the long gloaming of a desolate despair.

The woman of his wild desire was

passing from him, never to return—fading like that faint sail, where earth and heaven mixed their lights far out on the sunless sea.





## CHAPTER IV.

### MINA IS CONVALESCENT.



ALL that day Ethel remained in bed. The next morning she breakfasted in her room, and about an hour after breakfast she walked calmly into the morning-room, and gave her father his usual morning salute.

Her face was very pale; her left hand had a fine cambric handkerchief bound round it, otherwise she looked none the worse for her fall; nevertheless, Sir Charles

Sedley thought it right to expostulate with his daughter upon the folly of rising, and insisted upon treating her as if she were an invalid of some six months' standing.

When, therefore, she lifted her pale face to give him his customary kiss, he wound his arms about her and pressed her affectionately to him; then he placed her in an easy-chair, and took his seat by her side.

'Ethel, my love,' he said, 'do you feel strong enough to travel?'

'To travel, papa!' queried the girl, raising her eyes to his. 'Why, where in the world do you want to take me to, now?'

'Back to town,' returned the baronet, firmly. 'Lawrance and I are both agreed——'

'Lawrie,' returned Ethel, quickly. 'Why, where did you see Lawrie?'

‘Here, of course. On hearing of the accident he hastened here——’

‘Hoping to hear of my death, I suppose. Well, I think that fall would have killed anyone else—but I suppose I am destined to do more mischief before I die.’

She spoke half dreamily, utterly regardless of the expression first of horror, then of anger, which crossed her father’s face.

After a short silence the baronet spoke, as he did so taking his daughter’s right hand and pressing it between his own.

‘Ethel, my love,’ he said, ‘it is decided that we leave for town the day after tomorrow. Lawrie and I are both agreed that to linger longer in this place would be madness. He is tired of rustivating, and, moreover, he acknowledges that after this

accident the place can never have pleasant associations for any of us.'

While the baronet spoke his daughter smiled very strangely; but as he ceased her lip curled into a sarcastic sneer. She raised herself in her chair, and turned her eyes full upon his face.

'Papa,' she said scornfully, 'when is all this humbug, this contemptible double-dealing, to be at an end between us two? If you wish us to go away, why cannot you say it is because you are afraid to let my affianced husband linger any longer in the same village with the girl whom he loves better than he loves me?'

'Ethel!'

'There, do not attempt to expostulate. I mean to speak out the truth for once, at least, in my life. If you are afraid for



Lawrie, I am not; if you are afraid to linger, I am not. I have never been famed for affection, but I hope I have some gratitude left in me, and before I depart I mean to experience the pleasure of thanking the man who so bravely saved my life.'

The baronet burst into a laugh.

'Upon my word, Edith, you ought to be a melodramatic queen upon the stage, to go into such heroics over the young game-keeper. Depend upon it when he receives my cheque for fifty pounds he'll readily dispense with your thanks.'

'Your cheque? Have you actually sent him money?'

'Of course I have! I despatched Donald with it more than an hour ago. I was obliged to make the young fellow some compensation, and it was the only thing I

could do. I have no doubt he'd make an heroic rescue every day for such a reward.'

Ethel said nothing; her cheeks, lately so pale, were burning crimson; her right hand which grasped the chair was trembling and cold; her eyes were fixed upon the window, on the glittering panes of which the golden sunbeams played.

The window was partly open; she could hear the faint rustling of the heather and long grass; she could feel the perfumed breeze creeping in to cling about her nostrils and fan her cheeks, and in this dreamy warmth and scented stillness she closed her eyes.

Then her ears were filled with the noise of a rushing, roaring torrent; she seemed to be engulfed by waters, which settled around her and sucked her down; then

above the boiling eddy a face appeared, an arm was clasped around her, and at the touch her paralysed faculties seemed to brighten again into life.

It was only a repetition of the dream which had been haunting her ever since the hand had plucked her, as it were, out of the very darkness of the grave.

It had been present with her through the long watches of the night, as she had lain so calmly with closed eyes and gently heaving breast ; and though the cold daylight had somewhat dispelled the vision, she had but to close her eyes to bring it back again. But, this time, having recalled it, she clung to it as a young mother might cling to some dearly loved child which she knew she soon must lose.

How could she continue to cling to her

vision, to dream her dream, when her hero had accepted the price of his heroism, and brought the matter to an end!

She almost hated her father for having sent the money; yet, again, she felt rather pleased that it had gone.

If he accepted it—as in all probability he would do—she felt that she could travel back to London with a great deal of the load lifted from her heart; and if he did not—why, how much more worthy to be her hero!

Here Ethel's meditations were brought to a close. The opening of a door, an exclamation from her father, caused her to open her eyes. In the middle of the room stood Sir Charles Sedley with a torn envelope in one hand—an open letter in the other.

‘The insolent young puppy!’ he exclaimed; then turning to his daughter, he added, ‘So much for your hero, my love. He has had the impertinence to return my cheque, and to say that if I have any money to spare, I had better distribute it amongst the poor.’

‘And very good advice, too, papa, I should say,’ returned the girl, whose face and eyes had grown wonderfully bright again.

‘Good advice! Those sort of people have no right to give advice! It is a piece of impertinence which I should resent very strongly if he had not been of some slight service to you.’

Ethel smiled to herself, and without another word left the room.

How elated she felt! How her cheek burned; her hands trembled; her heart

leapt! She walked straight to her little sitting-room, and sat down by the open window, feeling again that the breeze came with refreshing coolness to touch her lips and eyes.

Her window commanded an extensive view of the country—of hill and valley cliff and sea. She could see the clachan clustering in its sheltered nook among the hills, the dark green cluster of trees which grew around the manse.

For a time she fixed her eyes upon this ; then she withdrew them, and gazed down at the hand which was enveloped in its cambric bandage.

‘ The only memento which I have of that eventful day,’ she said. ‘ The only witness of the doom from which he saved me. Well, when I have seen him, and thanked him,

and said "Good-bye," I will tear off the bandages, and try to keep the wound still there. Perhaps it might have been better if he had left me there to die—better for himself, for his sister, for Lawrie. Yes ; I am breaking their hearts, preparing for three victims one living grave. Poor Lawrie ! How nobly self-forgetful and honourable he has been ! Well, who knows—perhaps I may be able to make some amends !'

Meanwhile Lord Arranmore, walking out in the sunshine, was, like his cousin, speculating over all these things. He had had a long conversation with his uncle that morning, and half an hour before Ethel walked into the breakfast-room he had strolled out into the sunshine to think over all that had been said.

To his uncle's proposition that, as soon

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as Ethel's health was re-established, they should quit Coreveolan, he had not objected—not because of Ethel, but because he had learned by this time to fear himself.

Again that morning the talk of the two men had turned upon the engagement between the cousins ; again Sir Charles had pointed out the overwhelming shame which would cling for ever about his daughter should the engagement be broken through, and again Lawrance had given his pledge that the engagement should never be brought to a close by him.

So when the baronet proposed that hasty removal, Lawrance, soul-sick, and seeing no end to all this trouble, had given a ready assent. For he thought, ' Where is the use of lingering ? it will only be the means of bringing more wretchedness and misery to



us both. I would not care for myself; I am a man, and can bear it; besides, I have played the villain, and deserve to suffer; but for the sake of indulging my own mad feelings I will not be the means of bringing greater pain to her. Yes, I will go, and perhaps when once I am away she may learn to forget.'

Nevertheless, despite his philosophical reasoning, Lord Arranmore had never felt more utterly soul-sick. The thought of leaving Coreveolan was like turning his eyes towards the ghastly face of death.

He had wandered some two miles from Glenheather Lodge, and stood now looking down upon the manse. There it lay beneath the shoulder of the hill, bathed in sunshine, and looking as peaceful as it did that day when his feet first wandered there.

How vividly all that time came back to him now! Again he seemed to see Mina as he had seen her there, standing before the grey, old student, reading in her musical voice the dull Latin prose; how her hands had trembled, her face had flushed, at sight of him. It would have been better for them both if he had never lived to see that day.

He arose and walked a few steps further, gazing at the manse as one spell-bound. His eyes, wandering from point to point of the building, at length turned towards the open front door. There they remained fixed upon a figure which was seated just outside!

Mina? Yes, of course, it was Mina; he knew that by the wild rush of blood to his head—the quickened beating of his heart; but suddenly the mad heart-beats ceased—

his soul sickened more than ever to see what she had become.

Mina was seated in a well-cushioned wicker-chair—her head was thrown back, her eyes were closed—her face, so pale, and pinched, and sad, turned to the full glory of the summer sky. The sunlight fell all around her in a glittering shower, touching her golden hair, her wan cheeks, her wasted hands, and flashing back brightness from a little silver drinking-cup which she held in her hands.

It was the first prize cup which the *Jenny* had won, the present which he himself had brought her, when he had first come to disturb the sanctity of her home.

Lord Arranmore gazed at this picture for a moment in painful hesitation, then, obeying a mad impulse which came upon him,

he began to descend the shoulder of the hill.

Mina had fallen into a doze, lulled thereto by the warmth and brightness of the air about her, and the musical humming of the spinning-wheel which Kirsty, who had come out to keep her young mistress company, was working close at hand. A step upon the ground, a movement, a certain feeling of commotion, awakened her, and opening her eyes they fell upon the face and figure of young Lord Arranmore.

He stood looking woefully ill at ease, as if he were undecided whether to come forward or go back.

Kirsty had risen, and, in her excitement at seeing the young lord, had overturned her loom; while Mr. Macdonald, disturbed in his studies, as Mina had been in her

sleep, advanced from the shadow of the door.

Mina, still dazed from sleep, gazed for a time from one to another in utter bewilderment; then her pale face flushed, she cast down her eyes, and moved as if about to rise from her seat.

In a moment Lord Arranmore was beside her; he extended his hand and laid it lightly on her arm.

‘My dear Miss Macdonald,’ he said eagerly, ‘pray do not let me disturb you!’ then in a lower tone he added, ‘I am pained beyond measure to find you so much changed.’

Mina said nothing. Once or twice her tremulous lips had opened, but no words came. The colour had faded from her cheeks and left them ashy-grey; she pressed

her bloodless lips together, and clutched her fingers as if to calm the violent trembling of her hands.

At that moment Mr. Macdonald came forward, and, having courteously welcomed his guest, proceeded to speak for his child.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘Mina doesn’t look to-day like the healthy lassie who steered your lordship’s yacht into Uribol harbour; but she is a queen to what she has been, thanks again to old Koll Nicholson and Doctor John.’

‘Has Miss Macdonald been ill?’

The question was a superfluous one, but Arranmore did not know what else to say. He asked it ostensibly of the clergyman, but he fixed his eyes earnestly upon Mina, as if imploring her to speak.

But still she remained silent, her eyes

wandering in any direction but his, her face growing more pinched, her cheeks more ghastly white.

The clergyman, knowing nothing of the mental agony through which his child was passing, answered the question which the young lord had put, and by his answer made her trial more bitter than ever to bear.

For he told how Mina, coming home one night three weeks ago tired, sick, and dispirited, had thrown her arms around his neck and burst into a flood of tears ; how the next morning she had been found in violent fever, raving and calling on God to let her die ; and how for three long weary weeks she had kept her bed, and been assiduously attended by Koll Nicholson and Doctor John ; of the gradual abating of the

fever which had seized her, and her quiet return to life.

‘This is her first day out,’ he added, ‘and already the breath of air is giving new life to her. But I am keeping you standing too long, my lord. Mina, darling, shall I send Kirsty back to you while I am inside the house with his lordship?’

Before Mina could reply, before Lord Arranmore could open his lips to decline the polite invitation of his host, Graham Macdonald, emerging from the house, joined the group outside.







## CHAPTER V.

GRAHAM AND ARRANMORE.

**D**URING the whole of this scene Graham had been in his uncle's study watching the faces through the open window, and hearing every word that had been said. He had not intended to come forth, for he dreaded a meeting with Lord Arranmore; but since the conversation had taken such a turn, he thought it right that he should interfere, and try in a measure to relieve the pain which was

so plainly written on his sister's face. On issuing from the house he bowed politely to the young lord, then, walking over to his sister's side, turned his face towards the clergyman.

'You need not send out Kirsty, uncle,' he said. 'While you are in the house with Lord Arranmore I will stay with Mina.'

But before the clergyman could answer, Lawrance spoke.

'Thank you,' he said, 'I will not trouble you to go inside. I should not have come down at all to-day, but I have decided soon to bring my Uribol visit to a close, and'—turning to Graham—'I wanted to thank you, Mr. Macdonald, for your heroic conduct in saving my cousin's life.'

Graham bowed and flushed. The bow

was a cold acknowledgment of Lord Arranmore's thanks, the flush was called up by the memory of the way in which Sir Charles Sedley had sought to discharge the debt he owed.

The clergyman, wondering at his nephew's awkward silence, expressed a hope that Miss Sedley was not much injured by the fall.

'Thanks to Mr. Macdonald,' returned the young lord, quietly, 'I think my cousin has escaped without injury of any kind. But, of course, she is very much shaken and most eager to get to her physician in town.'

'Do you leave Uribol soon, my lord?'

'If Miss Sedley's health will permit it, I believe we are to start the day after tomorrow.'

‘ And you are likely soon to return?’

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

‘ That is as the fates decree,’ he said. ‘ I have spent many happy months here, Mr. Macdonald, and should not be sorry to linger still ; but to the best of us reverses come at times, and I, like others, have at last to obey other wills than my own.’

‘ Let me trust, my lord, if you will forgive me for speaking plainly, that when you are again in town you will not forget the folk amongst whom you have spent a pleasant time.’

‘ Mr. Macdonald,’ returned the young man, earnestly, ‘ if I ever see Uribol again, believe me, I shall not forget you and yours. I owe you a de't of gratitude which I know I can never pay.’

The clergyman bowed.

‘I do not speak of myself, my lord, or of my children; to us you owe nothing. I was thinking of the people of Uribol.’

The young man took the clergyman’s hand.

‘Mr. Macdonald,’ he said, ‘the kindness which I have received from you and yours shall be paid back tenfold to the people of Uribol. Command me, and I will obey. I will furnish you with my address, and I promise you that with whatever request you choose to make to me I will comply. I leave you the guardian of Uribol—look to the people; with my aid right every wrong; the more requests you make of me the happier my days will become!’

‘My lord, this I fear is a whim which will soon wear away.’

‘It is no whim, and it will not fade. I

tell you I owe you all a debt which I can never repay.'

All this while Lawrance, struggling with the wild rush of emotion which seemed to be consuming his very soul, had been trying to get one sight of Mina. But she was completely hidden from him by Graham, who stood before her holding one of her hands. At length, however, unable longer to keep aloof, he walked up to her, and out of common politeness Graham had to move aside. He did not move away, however. At the young lord's approach he felt the hand which lay within his own tremble and grow cold. He clasped his fingers more tightly around it, and resolutely took his stand by his sister's side.

Having gained his place, Lawrance paused in some embarrassment. Now that

he stood before Mina, he did not know what to say ; he could only gaze upon her pale, pinched face with ever-increasing sorrow. At length, however, feeling that all eyes were upon him, he extended his hand.

‘Miss Macdonald,’ he said, ‘in case I do not see you again, I should like to say “Good-bye.” ’

Mina’s pale cheeks flushed again ; she gazed for a moment at his extended hand, and placed her own within it.

‘Good-bye, my lord,’ she said quietly.

It was the first time she had spoken that morning ; the first time that Lord Arranmore had heard her voice since she had bidden him ‘good-bye’ on the hill ; and at the low, sweet, tremulous sound he felt his whole frame quicken. He felt impelled

to cast himself on the ground before her, to press her hands and kiss her lips; but at that moment the clergyman's touch recalled him to himself.

‘My lord, before you leave Uribol, may I have the pleasure of seeing you again?’

‘Certainly, if you wish to do so.’

‘I have drawn up a petition which I should like to show to you. I have one or two plans which I should like to unfold. With your permission, my lord, I will bring the papers to you to-morrow——’

‘By no means,’ interrupted the young man. ‘If it is all the same to you, Mr. Macdonald, I would rather come to the manse. So look for me to-morrow, or at latest the following day!’



Then, as if weary of the interview, he moved away, after having shaken hands with the clergyman, and raised his hat to Mina and her brother, who still stood by her side.

For a while the group remained at the manse door watching the agile figure as it moved slowly away among the hills. The clergyman remained for a time uttering praises of the young lord; finally, having important work to do, he re-entered the house, and left the brother and sister alone together.

Mina still reclined in her chair, her head resting on the cushions, her eyes following the figure of the young lord as it moved further and further from her sight. Presently it disappeared, and Mina shivered as if a chilly wind had struck her to the heart.

She turned her head, raised her eyes, and saw that her brother was watching her intently. As their eyes met, he pressed her hand more tenderly between his own.

‘Mina, my little sister,’ he said, ‘you are breaking your heart!’

His voice was so tender it brought the tears to her eyes, but the next moment she conquered her emotion and gave a strange smile.

‘A broken heart is a complaint which folk are not fashed with nowadays,’ she said.

‘For all that, my sister, you are breaking yours. They say deep wounds are best left to heal themselves, and, thinking that, I have said little, but I cannot stand by any longer and allow this to go on.

- Ever since the day that man crossed your path, you have ne'er been the same. I thought at first it was a lassie's pain that would easily pass away; but, instead of fading, your trouble grows.'

'No, no.'

'But it does. I can see the world is poisoned to you. Mina, it's not right; it's foolish and wicked to grieve so for what is utterly worthless.'

'Graham, dear, you do not understand.'

'Not understand! Great God! Mina, my heart has bled as well as yours. I too have loved, and found that love was poison!'

'Graham—you!'

'Yes, Mina, I. Some day, maybe, I will tell you all about it; now it's enough to say that there is no sorrow in your heart'

which has not found sympathy in mine. But there, that is all o'er. We both loved wraiths—things far beyond us and above us—we have both been cruelly awakened from our dreams, and must try now to comfort one another. . . . As to that man,' he continued, gazing after the retreating figure of young Lord Arranmore, 'he came to us with a lie on his lips, and he won your heart under a lie. You must try to forget him.'

'Forget him? Oh, Graham, I can never do that!' she said.

'He is a villain, Mina.'

'No, no, no!'

'But I say he is. He began in falsehood, and he went on in wickedness and falsehood, and now he can go gleefully back to his home, knowing well of the sorrow which he

has left you to thole. Mina, my wee sister, you have been good and brave. Thank heaven you did not let him ken that any thought of him could give you so much pain !'

'No, Graham, he does not ken.'

'Try to think that his shadow has never crossed your path. Be my own happy wee sister again. Think what we should do without you, Mina. I could never walk the hills again if I were to lose you, and Uncle Macdonald would never smile again. There are other men besides Lord Arranmore to live for. Let us try to be as happy as we were before he ever came. You must go on with your reading as soon as you are strong enough, and then, when the cold, damp, dreary weather comes on, I shall take you south for a change.'

At that moment the clergyman came out to see how his children were getting on, and was much concerned to find that Mina had been crying, and asked the cause of her sorrow. Seeing that she grew very agitated and ill at ease, Graham quietly answered for her.

‘This is Mina’s first day out, uncle,’ he said. ‘I am afraid she has overtaxed her strength, and feels her weakness. We must help her in. She must not be allowed to stay out so long another day.’





## CHAPTER VI.

### CROSS PURPOSES.

**H**AVING, with his uncle's help, got Mina into the house, and settled her comfortably upon the sofa in the study, Graham left her to the tender cares of Kirsty and the clergyman, and, issuing from the house, walked with rapid strides in the direction which had been taken by Lord Arranmore half an hour before. His mind was in a tumult. Anger, love, jealousy, and hatred mingled in his heart

like one consuming fire. The sight of his sister's pain had again steeled his heart against Lord Arranmore, and the memory of his own humiliation shamed him. Yes, the crowning insult had been put upon him that morning when, on opening Sir Charles Sedley's envelope, he had found the fifty pounds. He believed that Ethel had ordered it to be sent as a means of pointing out the distance which lay between them, and effacing the obligation which she felt she owed in return for the life he saved.

'Well,' he said to himself, 'she need not have troubled herself to point out my duty to me. I shall not fash her again ; but as sure as there is a God in heaven he shall not kill my sister.'

For some time he followed Lord Arranmore's path ; then he took a short cut across



the hills, which brought him to Glenheather Lodge. No one seemed about ; most of the windows were open, and Miss Sedley's favoured Blenheim spaniel lay near the open door, basking in the sunshine. Across the threshold a leopard skin was thrown ; on this lay a lady's cambric handkerchief. Graham saw all this as he boldly walked forward and knocked at the door. He asked for Lord Arranmore, and heard that his lordship had left the lodge half an hour after breakfast and had not returned.

'He must be lingering among the hills, then,' he thought, and without another word he turned from the lodge, and again took the path which led back to the manse. He had retraced some half of his way when suddenly he came upon the object of his search. Lawrance was seated upon the

brow of a hill, which commanded a distant view of the manse. He had pulled his hat down to shade his eyes from the sunlight, lit a cigar, and turned his face towards the building which he had lately left. So absorbed was he in this contemplation that he did not know of the near neighbourhood of any living soul until Graham touched him on the shoulder. At the touch he turned, and there passed over his face a look first of anger, then of surprise. He hurriedly rose to his feet, and was the first to speak.

‘Ah, Macdonald!’ he said, ‘do you wish to speak to me?’

‘I do, my lord. I wish to ask you to forego your intention of coming to the manse to-morrow. My uncle offered to bring his papers to you. He will wait upon you at any hour or place you wish.’

‘He said as much to me, but I told him I would rather come to the manse.’

‘Yes, you told him, and because he is unsuspecting and does not know the truth, he said “Come.” If he *did* know the truth, he would be the first man to turn you from his door.’

‘Did you follow me here to insult me?’

‘No, I have no wish to insult you. I only came to speak the truth, and appeal to your sense of honour. Lord Arranmore, we will not rake up the past ; let it rest — what is done cannot be undone—and perhaps you are no worse than others of your kind. What was pleasant parting to you nearly proved the death of my sister. She has borne up bravely and passed the ordeal. As you are a man, do not make her pass through it again.’

Graham spoke vehemently, every fibre of his frame seemed agitated. Lord Arranmore stood very calmly before him, but over his face there passed a pinched look of pain.

‘What do you want of me?’ he asked.

‘I want you to pledge your word never again to seek the company of my sister. You are leaving Uribol in two days, you say; surely you can keep apart till then. Come, will you give me your pledge?’

‘No.’

Graham started, and for a moment stared at the young man as if about to raise his hand and strike him.

‘Then, my lord,’ he said, ‘you are a scoundrel!’

‘Macdonald, do not use language of which you may afterwards repent.’

‘I shall never repent of telling the truth, Lord Arranmore. However, I am glad that you have shown me your intention so plainly. My way is clear now. To-night my uncle shall know everything, and in less than three days we will be beyond the shores of Uribol.’

‘Leave Uribol! Are you mad, sir?’

‘No. If you are scoundrel enough still to pursue my sister, I will prove myself man enough to save her. She shall not be tortured to death through *you*, my lord; and, mind, every pang which she is made to suffer shall be most religiously avenged!’

He turned as if to go, but Lord Arranmore laid a detaining hand upon him.

‘Macdonald,’ he said, ‘stay; this interview must not end here. I do not blame you for what you say. It is natural that,

having such a sister, you should guard her with more than ordinary care. I own that in my conduct to her I have been wrong, lamentably wrong, but I am not quite so culpable as you think.'

'Then, my lord, you will give me your pledge?'

'No, I cannot do that; but rest assured that Miss Macdonald shall suffer no further harm from me. I will not force myself upon her; I will try all in my power to make amends for the past. Ask your uncle to come to-morrow with his papers to Glen-heather Lodge. I will not visit the manse, and I think it will be better for us all if you will consent to say no more.'

The young man paused for a time. Graham said nothing. He wished to act for the best, and as yet he did not know exactly

what would be the best for him to do. He had no particular desire to expose Lord Arranmore, but he wished to spare his sister, and he knew that to leave Loch Uribol, where over forty years of his life had been passed, would almost break the clergyman's heart. He was not like a young man who is always prepared to begin life among new scenes and new faces ; his life was almost spent, and Graham knew that the one wish of his life had been to spend his declining years among his people, to fall asleep amongst them, and afterwards to lie in peace within sound of the sea, and with the Highland breezes blowing above his grave. It would be a heart-breaking task to take the old man away—the cause of the departure would make it more heart-breaking still. Besides, in ex-

posing the young lord he must necessarily lay Mina open to censure ; and although he himself knew she had not been culpable, he knew there would be many voices to blame her. He turned to Lawrance.

‘ If I promise not to divulge these secrets to my uncle, my lord, I do so in the full security that you will not subject my sister to further humiliation and pain.’

‘ You may do so.’

‘ I will tell my uncle to bring his papers to you to-morrow. I will tell my sister that in two days from this you and your party leave Loch Uribol for good.’

Lord Arranmore bowed.

‘ You will take no message from me!’

‘ None, my lord. She has already wished you good-bye.’

So with distant bows, and no hand-shakes,



the two men parted. Graham walked quickly back to the manse, and Lawrance, after taking one long look after him, strolled slowly on towards Glenheather Lodge.

Up in the lodge the hours had passed drearily. Sir Charles Sedley, still bent on an early departure, had shut himself in his study to work like a slave, while Ethel, busy with romantic introspections, had remained hour after hour in her room. Some few hours after she had left her father with the torn envelope and open letter in his hand, she sat by the open window of her room looking out dreamily upon the hills, when suddenly she saw the figure of Graham Macdonald walking quickly along the path which led to the lodge door. She started, blushed, and drew back, and from the shelter of the curtain watched him. Graham came

steadily forward without once raising his eyes. He paused at the door, which was just below her window, and knocked. Ethel by this time was standing before the glass arranging the straggling tresses of her hair. She pulled her waist-belt in half an inch or so, looked critically at her dress, then stood as if in expectation of a summons. None came. She walked carelessly to the window, and, looking out, saw the figure of Graham, dwarfed by distance, now rapidly retracing his steps homeward. Ethel stared first in wonder, then annoyance, and, going to the bell, gave it a sharp pull. Her maid answered the angry summons.

‘Did not Mr. Macdonald, the clergyman’s nephew, call at the lodge a few minutes ago?’

‘Yes, miss.’

‘Then why did you not bring me his message?’

‘He gave me none for you, miss.’

Ethel opened her eyes.

‘Did he not come to inquire for me?’ she asked in sheer amazement.

‘No, miss, he did not mention your name. He asked for Lord Arranmore. I told him his lordship had not been here since breakfast, and then he went away.’

‘He said nothing more?’

‘Not another word, miss.’

The maid retired, and Ethel, sinking into an easy-chair, began nervously to pull to pieces the flower which she wore in her breast. She sat thus for a time, then she walked over to the window again. Graham had disappeared, but far away in the distance she saw the dim outline of two figures

standing upon the brow of a hill. A powerful deer-stalker's glass lay among the knicknacks on her table. She looked through it, and, to her surprise, saw that the two men were no other than Graham Macdonald and Lawrance. She put down the glass, feeling more amazed than ever. At that moment her maid came in with a small tray bearing the afternoon tea. She was shortly followed by Sir Charles Sedley.

‘I am going to take a cup of tea with you this afternoon, Ethel,’ said the baronet, sinking into a chair. ‘Whew! how tired I am! I ought to have been out grouse-shooting all day, instead of pottering over packing-cases at home.’

‘Then why did you not go, papa?’ said Ethel, quietly.

‘Why did I not go? Because I’ve got such an infernal fool of a valet I can leave nothing to him. Have you ordered your boxes to be packed?’

‘No.’

She was still sipping her tea from the tiny porcelain shell, and looking out of the window at the two figures dwarfed by distance to mere specks, but dimly visible in the hazy mist of light. At her decided negative, uttered so quietly, the baronet looked up. Something in his daughter’s face made him feel uncomfortable.

‘Then it’s time you did give orders, my love. We leave here to-morrow for Coreveolan Castle.’

‘Do you?’ returned Ethel, quietly. ‘I do not; so there is no such hurry about my packing, you see.’

‘What do you mean, Ethel?’

‘Only this, papa; that I do not mean to be shut up in the nasty, fusty, mildewy, uncomfortable rooms of Coreveolan Castle while I can get a nice, wholesome, sweet-smelling lodge to shelter me. I mean that I have a fancy to live for a while in a place where I have fallen down a ravine and been rescued by a Highland chieftain.’

‘Ethel, you are a fool!’

The girl shrugged her shoulders and laughed with provoking good humour.

‘I believe that most men think the same of their wives and daughters. It remains for their lovers to discover them to be wise women. Therefore I presume that my wisdom, if I have any, will be hunted out by somebody!’

The baronet frowned, and for a while said

nothing. Ethel continued to look over the feathers of her fan at the two shadowy figures on the hill. Presently Sir Charles put down his empty cup and walked over to his daughter's side.

'Ethel,' he said, 'what do you mean to do about Lawrance?'

'Marry him!'

'Oh, you do, do you!'

'So it is decreed ; therefore, since such a terrible fate is in store for him, I wish to be magnanimous, and allow him to enjoy the few months of liberty which still remain!'

There was such coolness in her face, such a look of insolent laughter in her eyes, that the baronet could not trust himself to speak again. He turned on his heel and left the room. As soon as the sound of his foot-

steps died away upon the stairs, Ethel threw down her fan and again took up the field-glass. The two figures had separated. Arranmore was walking towards the lodge, but Graham had disappeared. Ethel put down the glass, and rang for her maid to dress her for dinner.

The dinner-hour at Glenheather Lodge was five o'clock ; at half-past four Ethel descended the stairs. She was plainly dressed, but wore a number of gems. A diamond collarette was clasped around her throat, a diamond spray glittered in her hair. On the fingers of her right hand she wore several rings, but the left hand was still bound up in the cambric handkerchief. Her father and Lord Arranmore were evidently dressing ; both the dining and drawing rooms were empty. The hall-door



still stood open, the leopard-skin was still stretched across the threshold, and the spaniel walked restlessly up and down outside. Ethel took her seat upon the leopard-skin, caressingly stroked the head of the spaniel, which had walked up to kiss her, and dreamily watched the sunlight as it played upon the hills.

It had been intensely hot all day, but now the breeze had grown a little cooler. The barren peaks of the distant hills were gradually becoming enveloped in a hazy mist of light, while over the throbbing blue sky was creeping a feathery film of white. Ethel could hear the distant sound of the bagpipes played by some shepherd gathering in his sheep. It came like fairy music from some fairy scene.

‘How lovely it all is,’ she said, looking at

the hills, the sky, the distant view of the ocean. 'I wonder if I could endure to spend my life here. I wonder if I should weary for the sickly, killing air of the ball-room, or a place among the crowded drivers in the Park? I wonder if I possess sufficient strength of mind to snap my fingers at society, and not repent of the rash act a few months after it was done? Women are weak-minded creatures at the best: oftentimes I am, otherwise I should not possess such an insane admiration of manliness and strength in man! That is just what I do admire. I should think ten times more of Lawrie if he'd the spirit to break with me and marry Mr. Macdonald's pretty little sister. She is quite good enough for him—just the kind of wife he ought to have, in fact; and I really believe that at one word

from me he would make her Lady Arranmore.'

A step upon the gravel startled her. Flushed and eager she looked up, and saw standing before her a servant boy from the manse.

'Well, sir,' she asked, smiling brightly, 'what is it? Have you any message for me?'

'None for ye, my leddy, but one for Lord Arranmore.'

'Give it to me, and I will deliver it. It is from Mr. Macdonald, I suppose?'

'Yes, my leddy. Ye'll tell his lordship, if ye please, that Mr. Macdonald will come to him here at twelve o'clock to-morrow.'

'I will tell him. Here is something for the trouble you have had in coming so far over the hill.'

She opened her purse, and gave the asto-

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nished boy half-a-crown; then as he went away she rose from her low seat and went into the drawing-room to await her father and cousin.

They came just before the second bell was sounded, and then they went straight in to dinner. Lawrance had complimented Ethel upon the marvellous power she seemed to possess of throwing off illness, the young lady had replied with a smile and a bow, and then nothing more was said. It was a very silent meal, owing partly to the presence of the two servants; and as soon as they left the room Ethel rose and went into the drawing-room, leaving her father and cousin alone. The drawing-room at Glenheather Lodge was now a pretty little apartment, furnished utterly unlike what drawing-rooms usually are. The polished floor

was covered with a number of lion, tiger, and leopard skins, taken from the animals which had been shot by Lord Arranmore when he went to India three years before. The cabinets and walls were ornamented with shooting trophies. Ethel walked about the room, followed closely by her favourite spaniel, and carelessly looked first at one thing, then another, as if she had never seen them before. The inspection over, she took her seat upon the fender-stool, and looked through the window at the glorious expanse of hill and sea. As she sat there, the door opened and Lawrance came in ; a footman followed with coffee, which he placed on a gipsy-table close to his mistress's side. Lawrance strolled about the room while the man remained. As soon as he had gone he took a chair close to Ethel's side.

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‘What is the matter with your hand, Ethel?’ he asked, noticing for the first time that it was bandaged.

‘Truly the eyes of love are keen,’ thought Ethel, and she said, ‘I cut it the other day when I fell into the ravine.’

‘What a mercy young Macdonald happened to be by!’

‘Was it not?—for me. I call him my Highland chieftain—he was so wonderfully brave. By-the-bye you have seen him to-day, have you not?’

Lawrance started, and looked up amazed, then he stammered:

‘Y—e—es; I walked down to the manse to thank him for what he had done for you.’

‘Oh, indeed; very kind of you, I am sure, to take so much trouble about me.’

Then when you were at the manse, I suppose you saw them all?’

‘Yes.’

‘The clergyman, Mr. Macdonald, and his sister?’

‘I saw them all; Miss Macdonald was seated in an easy-chair at the door. She has been ill; confined to her bed for several weeks, and came out for the first time to-day.’

‘Indeed!’

There was silence for some time; Lawrence, looking rather foolish and ill at ease, was bending forward to pull the ears of Ethel’s spaniel, while she, a frown upon her brow, was busily engaged in turning the ring round and round upon her finger. A howl of pain from the animal made her look up.

‘Don’t hurt the dog, Lawrance!’ she said sharply, and Lawrance let the dog go.

Again there was silence. Ethel reverted to the ring-turning, and Lawrance, having now nothing to occupy his hands, strolled over to the window and looked out.

‘What is papa doing?’ asked Ethel.

‘Sleeping in his easy-chair.’

‘Then, I suppose, we had better drink our coffee alone. Will you have yours?—it’s getting quite cold.’

He turned to take the cup which she offered him. Having done so, he resumed his seat at her side.

‘Do you think you will be well enough to travel on Thursday?’ he asked at length, after searching his brain for something to say.



‘Certainly I shall be well enough,’ returned Ethel, sharply—she seemed wonderfully sharp that night—‘all the same I don’t mean to do it.’

Lawrance stared at her in blank amazement now, and she uttered a petulant laugh.

‘Oh yes,’ she said, in answer to his astonished look; ‘I know you think it is all settled: but I don’t mean to be hurried out of paradise merely to satisfy a foolish whim of papa’s.’

‘Then we all remain?’

‘I do—for a few weeks, at all events. If you particularly wish to go away, you can. I do not wish to detain you. Perhaps you have had a surfeit of the place; you were here for several months before we came.’

‘ I have not had a surfeit ; there is plenty here for me to do, and I shall remain.’

Again he walked over to the window, and Ethel, instead of turning her ring, this time occupied herself by watching him.

‘ Lawrance,’ she said, at last.

‘ Yes ?’

‘ Mr. Macdonald called here to-day, and asked for you.’

‘ Did he ?’

‘ Yes ; and this evening, just before dinner, a boy came up from the manse with a message for you.’

‘ What was it ?’

‘ Only this, that Mr. Macdonald would meet you here at twelve o’clock to-morrow.’

‘ Oh,’ he returned, indifferently.

Ethel looked puzzled. The effect of this

conversation upon Lawrance was very different to what she had expected. Her curiosity was aroused. She walked over to where her cousin stood, and laid her clasped hands upon his shoulder.

‘Do you know, Lawrie,’ she said, ‘I am rather anxious to know what you and my Highland chieftain will find to talk about during your solemnly planned interview to-morrow!’

‘Do you mean young Macdonald?’ returned Lawrance in amazement. ‘He’s not coming here!’

‘Not coming here? I tell you he is—at twelve o’clock to-morrow.’

‘Why, Ethel, that is his uncle, the clergyman. He wants to have a talk with me about improving the condition of the people here before I go away!’

Ethel dropped her hands from her cousin's shoulder and walked away.

'It is horribly dull this evening,' she said impatiently. 'What can be making papa sleep so long?'

She went into the dining-room, woke up her father; then, pleading as her excuse fatigue and pain in the head, she wished both the gentlemen good-night, and retired alone to her room. She did not ring for her maid; she pulled off her jewels with a series of angry snatches, and threw them on the dressing-table, where they lay in a glittering burning pile. Then she took off her dress, and, wrapping a white cashmere dressing-gown about her, sunk into an easy-chair.

'He thinks I am leaving on Thursday,' she said to herself. 'He is not coming

to-morrow, and yet he could stand at the very door to-day and not even ask for me. After all, perhaps it is a pity I did not consent to go!





## CHAPTER VII.

### SUNSHINE AND STORM.

**T**HE next morning Miss Sedley had not changed her mind. As she lay in her bed looking at the light which crept in to her through the soft silken folds of rose-coloured curtains, she readily admitted to herself that it might be better for all if on the following day she were to follow her father's advice and quit Loch Uribol for ever. Nevertheless, she said to herself that she did not intend to go.

A splendid spell of weather seemed to have set in; this day was even finer than its predecessor. Sir Charles Sedley, relieved now of his odious task of packing, set off immediately after breakfast with his gillies, his dogs, and his gun. Lawrance, who had to await the arrival of the clergyman, went to write letters in his room. So Ethel strolled forth alone. She carried a book and camp-stool with her, and her spaniel followed close at her heels. She walked leisurely for half an hour or so, then, fixing her camp-stool in the deep heather, she sat down to read.

It was intensely hot. The sunlight fell in such scorching showers upon the earth that the dog, with quivering sides and lolling tongue, stretched himself in the heather

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at his mistress's feet, as if seeking for coolness and shadow. Ethel opened her book. Before beginning to read she looked round to see if there was any sign of her father. There seemed to be no one near. So after another dreamy look about her she began to read. She had read for half an hour or so when a growl, then a bark, from the dog made her look up. The sun was shining as brightly as ever, the heat seemed to have grown more intense, there was a great silence all around, but in the heather, a few hundred yards from where she sat, a figure was crouching, and a face, ghastly in its whiteness and intensity, was turned towards her. Ethel shuddered as she gazed. It was the face which had flashed before her vision on that memorable day when she fell into the ravine.



She looked around her. There was no one near. The dog, still agitated, uttering a half-growl, half-bark, kept his place by her side. She turned her head again and saw that the figure was still there.

In reality Ethel was very much frightened, but she maintained a stately calm. Taking her book beneath her arm and lifting her camp-stool, she walked quickly back to Glenheather Lodge, followed closely by her dog.

To those at home Ethel said nothing of this strange figure which seemed to haunt her—perhaps because she knew that the ghostly-looking being was a retainer of Graham Macdonald's. Nevertheless she deemed it prudent to keep the house for several days to come, and during that time she puzzled her brain to discover if possible

the meaning of these strange visions. But the more she thought the more puzzled she grew. She could not solve the mystery, unless, indeed, the old man was employed by Graham to watch her, and, since he was not sufficiently interested to inquire for her health, she thought he would scarcely put himself to the trouble of having her movements watched. No, it could not be that; the man was some half-witted creature doubtless who was fascinated by her face.

After three days' confinement Ethel went out again, carrying her camp-stool and book with her, and followed by her favourite dog. She was half-afraid to wander far; yet she felt she could not stay in the house. Graham had not called at the lodge, nor had any message come from the manse, and this continued silence — stubbornness, as she

called it—was beginning to tell upon the young lady's temper. She had wondered once or twice whether it would be consistent with her dignity to call at the manse, or to write a little note to Graham, thanking him for all that he had done. Both these ideas she had perforce thrust from her; she could only wonder and wait.

She walked for a yard or so through the long heather; when the intensity of the heat made her turn back. It was certainly far too hot for walking, so she returned to the lodge, sent in her camp-stool, had the leopard-skin again stretched upon the threshold, and reclined upon it.

Her father was out shooting, Lord Arranmore had gone on business to Coreveolan Castle. Ethel was alone. She lay for a

time upon the leopard-skin ; then, feeling the sun too warm, she rose and took a stroll through the shady house. The windows were open, sun-blinds were down, and every room was redolent with the sweet scent of heather and thyme.

Ethel stood in the drawing-room, enjoying the refreshing coolness and deliberating with herself as to whether or not she should again go forth into the sunshine, when a loud rap came to the door.

She started, hesitated, then, before the footman had time to answer the summons, she quitted the drawing-room and stood in the hall, facing the open door. At that moment the footman appeared, but Ethel, waving him back, advanced herself to welcome the new-comer.

It was Graham Macdonald.

He stood first outside the doorway, his hand still upon the knocker. At sight of Ethel the knocker was relinquished, and his hat lifted from his head.

‘Good-morning, Miss Sedley.’

He spoke gravely, earnestly, never once reflecting in his face the light which shone in hers. But Ethel was less formal ; she advanced in smiling confidence and held forth her hand.

‘Mr. Macdonald,’ she said, ‘what a stranger you are ! Come in.’

Courtesy compelled him to press the tips of her fingers, and he did no more.

‘Thank you, Miss Sedley,’ he said ; ‘I won’t come in, I am rather in a hurry ; but I should like to speak for a few moments with Lord Arranmore.’

Now, no one knew better than Ethel that



at that moment Lawrance was several miles away ; she knew also that he would not return to Glenheather Lodge until the next day at soonest, but she felt that if she said this, Graham Macdonald would take off his hat again, turn upon his heel, and straight-way depart. He looked so grave, so ready to go—he would not even place his foot upon the threshold, lest some magic power should hold him. Ethel felt she could not lose him ; she must invent some excuse to keep him, if only for a little while.

‘ If you will come in for a moment,’ she said, ‘ out of that scorching sunlight, I will see if I can find Lawrance for you.’

Still he remained stubborn.

‘ If you will be good enough to inquire,’ he said, ‘ I will remain here.’

The cruel sting in these words cut Ethel

to the heart. Could this be the man, she thought, who had saved her life at the imminent risk of his own? Could it be the same man who had carried her with such tender care, and soothed her in her half-unconscious, hysterical state with such words of tender kindness?

His face now was so cold and stern. It filled the proud girl's eyes with tears.

'Mr. Macdonald,' she said, 'what have I done that you should treat me so rudely—that you will not even cross my threshold?'

He started as if from a dream.

'Was I rude?' he said; 'then I beg your pardon, Miss Sedley. Certainly I will come in if you wish it, though I have only a few minutes to spare.'

He stepped across the leopard-skin as he spoke, and followed Ethel into the drawing-

room. Once he was inside she retired, closed the door, and left him alone. In the middle of the room Graham stood like one in an intoxicating dream. He had hesitated to cross the threshold because he dreaded his own weakness, his own love for the girl who, with eager, smiling face, was again beckoning him onward. And now that he had crossed the threshold, now that he was again breathing the enchanted air which seemed for ever to halo the places where she dwelt, he felt that the spell of his love for her was taking a greater hold upon him than it had ever done before. Why had he come there? Why, in his madness, had he relied too much upon his own strength, and cast himself bodily on the stream which had so often threatened to drown him! She had made him pass through it, and even at



her bidding he stood ready to venture forth again.

As he stood in the little drawing-room where she had left him, amidst the coolness of the shadow, the intoxicating scent of flowers, he thought over all that had passed between himself and Ethel Sedley since the first day that they had met, and the more he thought the more his soul revolted ; his cheek burned with shame. It was the memory of all that he had suffered which kept him strong that day.

He had only been alone a few minutes when the drawing-room door opened, and Ethel stood before him again. How pretty she looked in the cool, dim light of the room ! There was no curl of the lip, no haughty turn of the head to-day ; the proud, heartless lady seemed to have vanished and

given place to a loving, bashful girl. Graham saw all this, though he did not appear to be looking at her ; it made the battle which he had to fight all the harder to him. Ethel entered the room, closed the door behind her, and, seeing him standing in the middle of the floor, said quietly :

‘ Won’t you sit down ?’

He answered her question by another.

‘ Is Lord Arranmore engaged ?’

‘ Well, yes, I suppose he is,’ returned the girl in strange hesitation ; ‘ they tell me he left for the castle this morning, so it is quite uncertain when he will be back.’

Graham picked up his hat.

‘ Thank you, I am sorry I have given you the trouble——’

‘ Pray do not mention it,’ interrupted the girl, in a tone of angry sarcasm. ‘ I wish

you would put me to a little more trouble in order that I might repay some of my debt to you.'

'You did all you could,' he said, 'when you sent me that cheque for fifty pounds.'

She stared for a moment in blank amazement, then her cheek flushed painfully. Up to this moment she had forgotten all about the transaction which, when it occurred, had caused her so much pain.

'I never sent you that cheque,' she said quietly, 'and when my father did so I was totally ignorant of it all. Mr. Macdonald, on my father's behalf I beg your pardon; and now will you try to forget that, and allow me to thank you with all my heart for saving my life?'

He took the hand which she extended towards him, and held it for a moment in

his, looking the while with grave earnestness into her upturned face.

‘You must not think you are under any obligation to me,’ he said; ‘you are not. I am very glad, Miss Sedley, that at the time of the accident I happened to be by, and that you have had such a marvellous escape——’

‘Through you!’

He took no notice of her last words—perhaps he did not hear them—but, having relinquished her hand, again took his hat.

‘You are going?’

‘Yes. Will you tell his lordship that I called?’

‘Certainly; but won’t you stop and have some lunch with me? He may be back soon.’

‘Thank you; I cannot spare the time. I have work to do at the manse.’

‘Well, will you come back to dinner? We dine at six. Surely Lawrance will be back by that time. We will have a plain, quiet dinner, and then I will give you two conspirators the drawing-room that you may chat away all the evening by yourselves.’

Again her eager question was answered with a negative. Graham assured her that his evening would be spent in hard work at the manse. Ethel winced, but she would not show her discomfiture. Raising her eyes, she asked quietly:

‘How is your sister? I was sorry to hear from Lord Arranmore that she had been ill.’

‘Yes, Mina has been badly, but she is much better now, thank you.’

‘Would she let me go and see her, do you think?’

‘You are very kind, Miss Sedley; but just now Mina sees no one.’

Ethel was nonplussed; she could not think of anything more to say; so, after a silence of a minute or so, Graham held forth his hand.

‘Good-bye, Miss Sedley,’ he said; then, looking around the room, he added, ‘You are right to have plenty of Highland air about you. Doctor John, our physician, says it is the best medicine in the world.’

Then he stooped to pat the spaniel, walked through the hall, and out at the door, turning on the threshold to lift his hat ere he walked away.

His heart was beating madly with mingled triumph and joy. He felt like a

bird which had just escaped from the net which ensnared it. For the first time in his life an interview with Ethel Sedley had brought him contentment and joy.

Not so with Ethel. Having bowed and smiled in answer to his parting salutation, she sat down on the threshold of the house, and brushed from her eyes one or two scalding tears.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### KOLL'S TRIBUTE.

**A**ND now for the first time in her life Ethel Sedley began to experience a portion of the discomfort which she had liberally dispensed hitherto to individuals of the other sex. She had played with fire—at first for mere amusement, then from sheer coquetry and cruelty ; and now a spark had fallen in the most secret place of her heart, and was rapidly beginning to spread. She could no longer conceal from



herself that Graham Macdonald was her master, and that her spirit was too weak to resist for over-long the strength of his overpowering passion.

There is one road, at least, to the heart of every woman, but that one road has sometimes to be forced. No quiet approach, no delicate and over-nice respect, would have conquered the heart of Ethel. She had been used to the curled and scented darlings of the period, to the cold ornaments of society, to the insinuating foreigner, and to the self-sufficient lord of the land; but each and all had awakened in her bosom little or no interest. Even Arranmore, an uncommon man physically, and a superior person intellectually, found her cold and *blasé*. But with this young Highlander it was so different! His sullen fits, his

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flashes of hectic rage, his gloomy resentment, and his terrible passion, had at first impressed and amused her, and had ended by making her submissive and afraid. Now, Ethel was a girl of imperious disposition, and submission, with her, meant affection, while fear meant passion.

‘I wonder if I am in love at last?’ she said to herself, after their last interview. ‘It feels uncommonly like the sensation I have read of in French novels, and yet, perhaps it’s only admiration. I’ve never before, however, admired a man to the extent of wanting to put my arms round his neck, lay my head on his breast, and have a good cry! That’s how I feel with Graham; and the more he scowls at me the more I long to hug him. Perhaps it’s gratitude, with a slight tinge of hysteria.’

I've never been quite myself since the accident—since he saved my life; and sometimes I think the water must have soaked into my system, and made me weak, and tearful, and altogether stupid!

She was sitting at the window of the lodge, looking out as she mused. Her father was off for a last day on the moor, and she was quite alone, save for the old servant. All at once she started, for, standing in front of the lodge, looking in at her, was Koll Nicholson.

'That terrible old man,' she murmured, turning pale. 'What does he want? Why, he is making signs to me, and looks as if he had been crying. Good gracious! Why, he is going down on his knees.'

Holding his Scotch cap in his hand, and raising the other, as if pointing to heaven,

Koll was indeed kneeling, his eyes full of tears, his whole frame trembling. He seemed muttering to himself, but, the window being closed, she could not catch his words. Then he rose, and after kissing his hands in rapid pantomime, flitted swiftly away.

The next moment there was a knock at the door, and the old serving-woman entered with something on a dish.

‘What have you got there, Janet?’ asked Ethel.

‘It’s a present frae auld Koll Nicholson, my leddy—a troot fresh frae the sea.’

‘For papa?’

‘No, for yersel’. He bade me let ye ken it was for yersel’. I’m thinking the auld carle’s gone daft. ’Twasna but yestreen he brought up a creel o’ mussels; and when I

said nae leddy would like them, he gied a grunt and gaed awa'.'

'I hope you paid him for the fish,' said Ethel.

'I offered him siller, but he wouldna tak' a penny. He bade me gie ye the troot wi' his blessing, and to be sure and tell ye it was for yersel'.'

Ethel was puzzled. What could be the cause of the old man's extraordinary change of manner? Why was he bringing her those votive offerings from the sea? Before, his aspect had been forbidding in the extreme, and expressive of the most malignant dislike; now, it was characterised by the most solemn sorrow and devotion. Then, what did he mean to express by those wild signs, by that fervid pantomime in the sight of heaven?

The only legitimate explanation present-

ing itself to Ethel's mind was that the old man was, or was becoming, crazy ; and that, in the manner of lunatics, he was subject to strange moods of attraction and repulsion.

The next morning another votive offering appeared, in the shape of a monstrous living cray-fish, left at the door by Koll's own hand ; and at midday Koll himself reappeared carrying on his wrist a small kestrel in full plumage.

'Did her leddyship eat the wee cray-feesh she brought her leddyship?' he asked eagerly. 'Did you roast the cray-feesh for her leddyship?'

Janet nodded, the fact being that she had thrown the fish into the neighbouring river without saying a word to her mistress on the subject.

‘Would her leddyship like to have a braw hawk?’ proceeded Koll, smoothing the plumage of the bird he was carrying. ‘Oh, it is a grand bird, and she foond it hersel’ this year in the nest! Will you tak’ it to her bonnie leddyship?’

At this moment Ethel herself appeared. The old man spoke loudly, and she had recognised his voice in the distance. As she entered the kitchen, looking radiant in a morning dress of some exquisite material, the old man uttered a loud cry, and fell kneeling before her, stretching out his bony hands, with the hawk still clinging to one of his wrists. Then kneeling, he rapidly gave vent to a long speech in Gaelic.

‘What does he say?’ asked Ethel.

‘I canna richt mak’ oot,’ said Janet; ‘but he’s calling the blessing o’ God on

your leddyship, and he says he would dee to gie you pleasure, and he begs and prays your leddyship to have the hawk as a gift frae himsel'.'

'What a beautiful bird!' said Ethel. 'It is very kind of you to bring it to me, but I'm afraid I shan't know how to keep it, and I have no cage large enough.'

Koll, however, rapidly explained, through Janet, that no cage was necessary, the bird being trained like a parrot to sit on a perch anywhere, and not to fly away, while, as to food, all he needed was an occasional meal of chopped meat or a piece of raw fish. He was a beautiful little bird, in full male plumage, and when, at Koll's desire, Ethel smoothed his poll with her forefinger, he merely expanded his powerful wings, and uttered a faint scream of pleasure. So,



seeing how earnestly Koll wished her to do so, Ethel accepted the gift, and the bird was forthwith installed on the back of a kitchen chair, where he sat still and grim as death, watching with his great black eyes in silence.

Then the old man seized Ethel's hand with trembling fingers, kissed it reverently, and, after some muttered words in Gaelic, went away.

Ethel had accepted the gift with some readiness, because it had suddenly occurred to her that the real giver was not the old fisherman at all, but his foster-son. Yes, the hawk at least was worthy of Graham—just such a present as he might send. The cray-fish and the creel of mussels were in poor taste, but had perhaps been brought because the fisherman had been instructed

to take up to the lodge whatever dainty came to his net, and had scarcely known how to discriminate when a young lady's appetite was in question.

The more she thought it over the more convinced she became that all the presents came, directly or indirectly, from Graham. This made her delighted with the kestrel. When her father came home from shooting she took the bird on her wrist, hawking fashion, and carried it to him. It did not escape her fancy that, with all its prettiness, it belonged to a fierce, indomitable species, like Graham himself.

But the very next morning another present was left in the kitchen, in the shape of a dead heron, which Koll had shot, and which already emitted a very ancient and fish-like smell. Ethel laughed, but

thought the votive offerings were becoming absurd.

After breakfast she took the kestrel on her shoulder and walked out on the moor, down towards the dark lake, where she had often met Graham. The bird was not fastened in any way, but made no attempt to escape; only, when his eye caught a glimpse of passing small birds, he waved his wings wildly, and exhibited much excitement.

Standing on the hillside, she took him on her gloved hand, and threw him up into the air. He made one wide circle round her, and then alighted on a rock close by.

It was very like a rendezvous, for at that moment Graham himself appeared.

‘Oh, Mr. Macdonald!’ she cried gaily,

‘I’m so glad you have come! Will you teach me to train your bird?’

He looked at her in surprise, then at the kestrel.

‘I see you have got a young kestrel,’ he said. ‘It is of no use for hawking.’

‘I suppose not. Well, I don’t want to hawk, but I should like to see it fly.’

‘They are rather stupid birds,’ observed Graham, lifting it up on his hand.

Ethel looked at him with her brightest smile.

‘Is that why you sent it me?’ she asked.

‘I?’

‘It is scarcely fair of you,’ she proceeded, ‘to pretend ignorance, just as I want to thank you for your kindness. It is so good of you to keep sending me such nice presents. Papa says the heron is a royal bird,

and we are going to try it to-day for dinner.'

As she went on the young man's countenance expressed more and more surprise, deepening into dark vexation.

'I am afraid you are laughing at me,' he said. 'I have sent you no presents.'

'Not even that lovely hawk?'

'Certainly not.'

Ethel parted her lips and flushed to the forehead.

'I thought it came from you, or I should not have accepted it. I received it from the strange old man you call your foster-father.'

Graham started, frowning fiercely.

'From Koll Nicholson?'

'Yes, from him; the old man who looks like one of Fingal's giants.'

‘What!—did he—did he *dare*——’

He paused, flushing crimson, and biting his lips.

‘Dare? I am sure it was very attentive. To be candid, I did not think you sent me the cray-fish, or the shell-fish, or even the dead heron; you could never have thought I had such an appetite; but I did really fancy you had given me this charming bird.’

‘Was it sent—were those things sent—in my name?’

‘O dear, no,’ answered Ethel, with her lightest laugh. ‘They were normally left, as silent offerings, on Janet’s kitchen-table, but I thought——’

‘Why should you think that I was such a fool at all?’

‘I thought it very nice of you.’

‘You are laughing at me,’ said Graham firmly, irritated by the unconscious resumption of her old tantalising manner. ‘I will wring the old fool’s neck for daring to come near you. It seems as if everyone was in a conspiracy to make me look ridiculous in your eyes.’

‘But you don’t look ridiculous.’


‘I do.’

‘On the contrary, Mr. Macdonald, you look most interesting. You saved my life—shall I ever forget that?’

‘I wish we had drowned together!’

‘I don’t.’

‘Those few minutes were worth a lifetime. I had you in my arms—I brought you back to life—I was never so happy before, and I shall never be so happy again——’



‘ Though we were so wet!’

‘ Aye, you may laugh, but I don’t care now. It was *I* that saved you—it was *I* that had you all to myself for those happy minutes; it was not the Laird of Arranmore!’

She saw his passion rising again like a great wave, and this time she felt ready not to oppose it, but to meet it half-way, and fling her arms about his neck. Her mood changed, from lightness to the tenderest pity, as she said:

‘ Dear Mr. Macdonald, you don’t think me ungrateful. I know I am very irritating—everyone finds me so; but, believe me, I would not willingly cause you pain. I am only sorry that you did not send me the bird, because I should have prized it as a gift from you.’



He was calmed in a moment, and like all men, being encouraged, felt ready to encroach ; but something in her very tenderness of manner subdued him, and made him keep his place. He looked at her with worshipping eyes, while, with a tear trembling on her cheek, she asked :

‘ How is your sister ?’

‘ She is better ; she will soon be well.’

‘ I am so glad. Do you think she would mind if I were to come and see her before I go away ?’

‘ I am sure she would be very pleased.’

‘ Then tell her that I will come.’

At this moment Sir Charles Sedley appeared, gun in hand, to break the *tête-à-tête*. He came upon them almost before they perceived him, and when he saw them in such close conversation looked far from

amiable. He nodded in a friendly way to Graham, and then turned to his daughter.

‘I’ve been looking for you everywhere.’

‘Indeed, papa!’

‘You’re wanted up at the lodge.’

‘By whom?’

‘Come and see. Mr. Macdonald will excuse you ; it’s a matter of business.’

Ethel turned to speak to Graham, but he had already walked away. She looked after him quietly, and then turned to her father, and said :

‘I think you might be a little more courteous to the man who saved my life.’

‘I am civil to him, and I have shown my gratitude,’ returned the baronet, sharply ; ‘but I’m not going to encourage the man in flirting with my daughter.’

‘Absurd, papa!’


‘There is no doubt of it, Ethel; you keep the poor devil dangling after you, although you know you have no right to give him a moment’s encouragement. I thought you had more sense. Why, even if he were a gentleman——’

‘He *is* a gentleman!’ cried Ethel, warmly.

‘Gentleman or no gentleman, he is not your equal.’

‘No, he is infinitely my superior.’

Something in the tone of the voice startled the baronet, and, turning sharply on his heel, he looked into his daughter’s face and saw, to his amazement, that her eyes were full of tears. Brushing the back of her hand across her eyes, she laughed nervously, and walked over to the kestrel, which was still seated moveless upon the rock, and took it again upon her wrist.



‘ I suppose the fellow gave you that bird !’  
said her father.

‘ No ; if the fellow had done so, I should prize it more than I do.’

‘ You are incorrigible !’

‘ Indeed !’

‘ Yes, you are a commonplace coquette—you care for no one, but you delight in torturing every poor fool who crosses your path. You’d flirt with an under-keeper, or with a groom of the stable, if no one else was handy. It’s scandalous, Ethel. I shall never sleep in peace till I see you transformed into a sensible married woman.’

‘ I’m afraid that transformation is impossible,’ returned Ethel, with a touch of her old light manner. ‘ I don’t care much for being either married or sensible, and I am

quite sure I shall never be both. But who wants me at the lodge?’

‘Lawrance, of course.’

‘No one else?’

‘No; the fact is, I couldn’t see you talking so closely with that man and not interfere. I wouldn’t have had Lawrie see you for all the world!’

‘Do you think he’d care?’

‘Care? of course he’d care. God bless me! Ethel, do you think Lawrance has no feeling—no common delicacy? You talk as if he were some one else, instead of your affianced husband.’

Ethel did not reply, but only smiled coldly; then, followed by her father, who continued to fume with irritation, she walked slowly towards the lodge. But when she reached it, Lord Arranmore was not there.

He had walked down to the clachan, Janet said, and had not stated when he meant to return.

The next day Ethel walked down to the lake again, but before starting waited to see her father well away among the hills. The fire in her heart was rapidly spreading, and she felt that she must see Graham again. Besides, they had parted abruptly, and before they had come to a perfect understanding. He might still think her unfeeling and ungrateful, and that she could not patiently bear.

What was her surprise when she stood on the lake-side to see Koll Nicholson appear before her, wild, haggard, with famine-stricken eyes! He started out from behind a great boulder, and at first she shrank back with a cry. But his purpose

was gentle. Stretching out his hands to her, he fell as before upon his knees, and actually kissed the hem of her dress.

‘What is the matter?’ she cried. ‘What do you want?’

‘She wants your leddyship’s blessing,’ said Koll in great agitation. ‘She wants you to speak to her ain son, and to her ain bairn, and tell him no to be sae hard on Koll. Speak to him, my leddy, speak to her ain son Graham. Tell him to forgie her for bringing you the braw hawk, and the heron, and the creel o’ fish frae the sea. She meant nae ill to his bonnie leddy—nae ill ava. But the Lord has turned the heart of her ain foster-son against her!’

He ended with a wild cry, for over him stood Graham himself, his eyes flashing, his whole frame trembling with anger. He

said something to Koll rapidly in Gaelic, and Koll replied wildly in the same tongue. Ethel looked on in wonder, while the two men faced each other; for Koll had risen to his feet, and stood gazing vacantly upon his foster-son.

‘What is it all about?’ she cried nervously. ‘Why are you angry with the old man? Why, he seems quite heart-broken.’

Without replying to her questions, Graham pointed in the direction of the village.

‘Go home!’ he said between his set teeth.

‘She will go! she will go!’ cried Koll, wringing his hands.

‘If you ever again approach this lady I will have you punished, mind that! How,



dare you look her in the face! Go home!

Obedient as a deer-hound, the old giant turned and moved slowly away, not without a last appealing gesture to Ethel, who turned immediately to Graham.

‘Mr. Macdonald, I am sorry to see you so violent. What has the poor old man done?’

‘I cannot tell you now.’

‘Is it something very dreadful? Well, but see how penitent he is. You must pardon him for my sake!’

‘It is just for your sake that I cannot pardon him!’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘No, you cannot,’ said Graham, sadly.

‘Is it because he sent me those presents?’

‘ No ; but he had no right to send them, or to thrust himself upon you.’

‘ Poor fellow !’

‘ He does not deserve your pity. He is both cruel and cunning, and he is most dangerous.’

‘ Dangerous?’

‘ Yes, Miss Sedley. You see I know his character, and you do not.’

Ethel looked at the young Highlander for some moments in silence, then she said quietly :

‘ Will you do me a favour?’

‘ Any you please.’

‘ Forgive the old man ; go after him and tell him that you forgive him.’

‘ He does not deserve it. If you knew what he has done——’

‘ But I don’t want to know ; only I don’t

like to see you so bitter against him. Whatever his offence has been, he is very sorry, and I think you are treating him too unkindly.'

'I am *not*.'

'Then you won't grant me my request?'

Graham flushed and trembled.

'I have told you that I will do what you please. You have only to command me in anything.'

'And you'll obey?'

'Yes.'

'Then I'll try you,' said Ethel, smiling. 'Follow the old man, and say something kind to him.'

'I will do as you wish,' returned Graham, earnestly; 'and I will tell him, too, that I forgive him at your desire.'

Without another word he walked off,

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following the path taken by Koll. Ethel stood looking after him with a strange smile, well pleased to find him so obedient to her slightest word, yet wondering at his capacity for violent passion of all kinds. He was her ideal of a lover; not so much her ideal of a husband. His stern and strong nature mastered her, and she trembled before his violent strength.

Graham overtook Koll at last, and called out his name. The old man turned, trembling.

‘Shake hands, Koll!’

Koll reached out his hands with a cry.

‘Let us forget what has passed,’ continued Graham. ‘Miss Sedley has pleaded for you, and I forgive you, but she does not know of your wicked attempt upon her life.’

If she knew it she would despise and hate us both.'

'Graham! and you will not tell Mina, her bairn?'

'No one shall know it; only remember, from this day forward, how good that lady is, and pray to God to forgive you for having tried to do her harm.'

Turning back, he came presently to the spot where he had left Miss Sedley, and found that she had gone. With a heavy sigh he turned his face homeward towards the manse of Uribol.





## CHAPTER IX.

### A HIGHLAND FEAST.

**T** was now late in the autumn, and the chill, still days of calm seas and silver lights and shadows were beginning to be broken by days of blustering storm. The northern ocean was troubled, wild birds were winging southward, and a cold breath from the Pole was felt upon the sea. Sport was bad, and Sir Charles Sedley began to long for the comforts of his club.

The day after Graham's reconciliation with his foster-father, Glenheather Lodge was deserted, and the Sedleys had migrated to Coreveolan Castle. Ethel departed without a word of farewell, and the promised visit to Mina remained unpaid. When the news of her departure was carried to Graham his dark fit seized him, and he almost wept.

She was still only a few miles away, but it seemed she had gone from his gaze for ever. He walked up the moor, and for hours hovered round the lodge, then, entering it, talked to the old caretaker about its late inmates. Janet was full of praise for Miss Sedley—for her beauty and her kindly ways.

But how cold and desolate seemed the place now she had gone! The whole land-

scape was changed, and grown stormy, sad, and wild. Graham haunted the spots where they had met, leant over the dark pool into which she had fallen, and tried to recall the rapture of that day when he saved her life. Then his spirit rose against her because she had gone so silently. She might have sent some message or a few words. She was heartless after all, and had forgotten him perhaps already.

Two days passed, during which he suffered exquisite tortures, the more poignant because he had no one to share them with him. He had almost resolved to walk over to Coreveolan, and to ascertain if Ethel was *there*, when on the evening of the second day Angus with the dogs turned up with a letter for the minister.

He had been passing the castle, he said,



with his canine family, when he had been called, regaled liberally, and asked to carry a letter to Uribol.

‘It’s frae the laird himsel’, he said, grinning.

Mr. Macdonald opened it, and read as follows :

‘DEAR MR. MACDONALD,

‘Before leaving Coreveolan for the winter I have arranged to give a supper and ball to my poor tenants, and to all friends within driving-distance. It is fixed for next Tuesday, the 20th inst.; may I look forward to the pleasure of your company, and that of your niece and nephew, who will, I am sure, excuse a more formal invitation? I have persuaded Sir Charles and Miss Sedley to remain over that date, and,

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with your assistance, I think we may make the little affair a pleasant one to all concerned.

‘Believe me, with kind regards to all your household,

‘Yours most truly,

‘ARRANMORE.’

When Graham read this note his face lightened, and he turned eagerly to Mina, who sat writing in the room, her uncle’s study.

‘Shall you go, Mina?’ he asked.

Mina shook her head.

‘Of course we must go,’ exclaimed the minister. ‘It is a great occasion, and must on no account be neglected. It was very kind of his lordship to send a special messenger over. Mina, my bairn, don’t think

of staying at home: the fun will do you more good than all Doctor John's prescriptions, and, besides, you are now quite recovered.'

Mina cast a piteous glance at Graham, but said no more. She was resolved in her own mind that she would not go to Coreveolan Castle, but would find, when the time came, some expedient to make her uncle go alone.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Macdonald quitted the room, and Mina and Graham were left alone together.

'Shall you go, Graham?'

'I'm not sure,' answered Graham. 'After all, what do they want with the likes of us? I think I shall stay at home.'

'And so shall I, Graham.'

'And yet, perhaps, if we *don't* go they

may think we're afraid to hold up our heads with theirs. It would, perhaps, be the best to show them how little we heed them, by going with all the rest.'

'Then go *you*. I could not bear it.'

Graham stood on the hearth looking darkly down at his sister.

'If I were in your place,' he said, 'I would go, and I would let the laird see that your heart is light as a feather, that you heed him and his no more than the cheep of a sparrow. Don't let the grand fool know that you are grieving for him. Look him full in the face, and go by him laughing with other folk, as if he had never been more to you than a whiff of wind.'

'I have not the courage,' answered Mina. 'Besides, he is so kind, and he would be sure to come and speak to me before all the

others, and I could not bear it. You shall go in my place, if you are not afraid.'

Graham started angrily.

'What should I be afraid of?'

'Of your own heart, Graham. No, don't go—it would only make you miserable afterwards.'

Graham gave a short, angry laugh.

'I'll risk it,' he said, and, whistling a strathspey, walked out of the house.

In his own mind he was already resolved to go. He had planned it all. He would face her like a man, like an equal, and he would ask for her hand in the dance. He would at least have the rapture of encircling her waist again, of pressing her hand, of hearing her voice. For such a happiness, however brief, he felt that he would give

his very soul. Tears of gratitude came into his eyes as he thought that she was not gone yet after all, and that he should see her at least once again.

Left alone, Mina confirmed herself in her first resolution to stay away. The more she thought it over the more she felt convinced that the invitation, though extended to all equally, was meant for her particularly, and that the young lord was only seeking a pretext to see her again. But all was over between them, and, though he was very kind, she felt that it was better that they should never meet.

When the evening of the festal gathering came there was excitement indeed over at Castle Coreveolan. Flags waved from the roof, large tents were erected on the heather, all the rooms were thrown open, and even

the kitchen was splendidly decorated and prepared for company. Early in the evening the people began to gather; wild fishermen of the shore, with their wilder-looking women; ragged crofters from the hills, with their still more ragged children; decently clad small farmers, overseers, and tacksmen. Mounted on his pony, Peter Dougall rode over gloomily, showing in his grim face strong disapproval of the whole proceedings.

Accompanied by Miss Sedley and her father, the young lord moved from group to group and made himself generally popular. Many a smile and blessing followed him as he moved along with his affianced bride upon his arm.

There was plenty to eat and drink, though of the simplest description, mutton

in all shapes predominating ; but, what was of far more consequence from the Highland point of view, there was no stint of the best whisky. As the fiery fluid mounted upward tongues began to loosen, until the babble of voices was terrible to hear. At last the great hall was cleared for dancing, and two or three pipers, a fiddler, and a fife-player were installed on a raised platform to play reels and strathspeys *ad libitum*. The floor was soon covered with dancers, and the roof rang to the strains of 'Hoolaghan' and 'Tullochgorum.'

All the evening Arranmore had looked about anxiously for the Macdonalds, and though many of the same name and clan were forthcoming, he could not discern his friends from the manse. At last, however, he discovered to his delight, towering



above all others, the head of the old minister.

He at once crossed the hall, and pushed his way to the spot where the clergyman stood.

‘I’m so glad you have come!’ he exclaimed, shaking hands. ‘I hope you are not alone?’

‘Graham is with me,’ replied Mr. Macdonald. ‘I’m sorry to say my niece was too unwell to come.’

The young lord’s face fell.

‘Not seriously ill, I hope?’

‘I think not ; but the lassie has not been herself of late, and I’m concerned about her. She bade me say that she thanked your lordship kindly for your invitation, and that she was very sorry not to be strong enough to accept!’

‘I am sorry, too,’ said Lord Arranmore. ‘I was looking forward to a reel with Miss Macdonald as my partner.’

The minister smiled, but made no remark, while Lord Arranmore looked round for Graham.

At first he did not see him, but casting his eyes round the room he at last discovered him in animated conversation with Miss Sedley. Ethel was looking her brightest, and gazing up into the young Highlander’s face with a smile such as his cousin had never seen upon her face before ; in fact she seemed transformed and prettier than ever ; Graham, too, looked his best.

Plainly but neatly dressed in black, with snowy linen and carefully trimmed beard, he stood and listened earnestly, quite un-

conscious of anything but the presence of the woman whom he loved.

When the young lord went over and offered his hand, Graham's face darkened.

'I am sorry your sister was too ill to come,' said Arranmore, awkwardly.

'She is better away,' answered Graham, quietly.

Their eyes met ; Graham's were steady. Arranmore bit his lip in nervous irritation.

'Shall you dance ?' he asked, looking at Ethel.

'Mr. Macdonald has just been asking me to dance with *him*, but I never attempted a reel in my life, and I shall break down.'

'It is very easy,' said Graham.

'So it seems,' returned Ethel, watching the dancers, 'but not with a long train. They seem to enjoy it amazingly. That

disagreeable-looking old man in the kilt must be eighty if he is a day. Yet he has never sat down a single dance, nor paused a moment except to go to the tables and take liquid refreshment.'

Arranmore looked at her quietly, and seemed piqued. Her manner had entirely changed, and all the light had faded from her face, to be replaced by the cold and haughty sneer he knew so well. He glanced at Graham. The young Highlander was frowning nervously and looking on the ground.

'Ethel,' said a familiar voice, and Sir Charles Sedley, bustling up and whispering, led his daughter away.

The two young men were left standing near to each other, and almost alone. There was a pause. Both looked at the

dancers, but the thoughts of each were far away.

‘I am pleased to see you,’ said Arranmore, breaking the silence at last, ‘though I should have been better pleased to see your sister with you. It shows at least that you bear me no serious ill-will.’

Graham was silent, and the other continued :

‘I should like you to consider me your friend, and the friend of your family. If I have ever, in sheer thoughtlessness, caused you annoyance, I am sincerely sorry, and I trust you will suffer me to make amends.’

‘Pray don’t speak of *that*, my lord ; let us bury the past.’

‘It is not so easy,’ returned Arranmore ; ‘and, after all, why should we try to bury it? In looking back we should count the

bright days as well as the dark. I have spent here in the Highlands some of the happiest hours of my life.'

'With you that is all very well,' answered Graham, quietly. 'You can come and you can go; everything, even Uribol, is a change. But it is different with those who have to pass all their lives in loneliness.'

'Shall *you* remain here? Don't think me impertinent; but what are your plans for the future?'

'I have none,' answered Graham. 'I was to have entered the Church, but now I am sick of it. But I *cannot* remain here; I *hate* Uribol.'

'You hate it? Why?'

'For a hundred reasons. It is a barren wilderness, not fit for a man. I should kill

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myself, I think, or kill somebody else, if I was compelled to live here.'

Arranmore looked at the speaker in surprise. His face was flushed, his eyes burning, and he evidently spoke under the influence of strong emotion. Nor did Arranmore fail to notice that his gaze had followed Ethel Sedley from one part of the room to another, and was now resting upon her as she stood talking to her father at the other end of the hall.

'How different your feelings are to mine!' said the young lord, earnestly. 'Do you know I think I could live and die in these wilds, which you dislike so much? I suppose it is the contrariety of human nature. Just because I belong to the busy world I hate it; while you, on the contrary, being surfeited with solitude, seek

excitement. Upon my word, Macdonald, I wish we could change places—I should be quite content!’

Just then Mr. Peter Dougall came up, smiling grimly, and began talking generally over the affairs of the estate. Lord Arranmore had not altogether conquered his dislike to, and want of confidence in, the factor, but he had scarcely decided as yet to dispense with his services. He strolled away with him in careless chat, leaving Graham alone.

The hall was now uncomfortably warm, the fun was growing fast and furious, and the giver of the entertainment had wisely arranged that the tenants should amuse themselves in their own way, without any settled programme, and with little or no supervision. One or two choice spirits,



tenant farmers and drovers, had constituted themselves masters of the ceremonies, prepared to keep the ball going and the liquor flowing till dawn of day. The dancing grew wilder every minute, the screams of the pipes, the babble of voices, the clatter of feet on the bare boards, and the whirl and noise of people coming and going, was rapidly passing into 'confusion worse confounded.'

Gloomy enough now, Graham passed out of the dancing-hall, through the intervening chambers, and out into the night. Various groups were gathered about the castle door, but no one took any notice of him. He moved on, and found an empty seat on the terrace before the castle.

It was a still, cold night; the sky was thick with stars, and the aurora was flash-

ing far away to the north. From the distance rose a deep, solemn murmur—the heavy, slumberous breathing of the sea.

He lit his pipe, and sat brooding over his own dark thoughts for some minutes. He was startled by a low laugh behind him. Turning, he saw a slight figure standing close to him in the starlight.

‘Is that Mr. Macdonald?’ asked Ethel’s voice.

‘Yes!’

‘Why did you run away? They are going to try a country-dance, and I want you for my partner.’

‘I am ready.’

‘Oh, there’s no hurry—the reel is not finished yet, and it is so hot in there!’

‘But a heavy dew is falling here. You will catch cold.’

‘It doesn’t much matter if I do,’ said Ethel quietly, sitting down beside him. ‘I should not be much of a loss if I caught cold and died.’

‘God forbid!’

‘Papa would fret a little, and I suppose Lawrance — I mean Lord Arranmore — would wear mourning for a little—then he’d cheefully marry some one else.’

The moment was propitious, and poor Graham could not resist the temptation.

‘You forget *me*,’ he said softly.

‘No, I don’t. You, my Highland chieftain, would be rather sorry, I suppose. What a pity you did not let me drown!’

‘Why?’

‘Because I am what they call an incubus, annoying to myself, and of no use to anybody. Now, a romantic death by drowning

would have redeemed my life from commonplace, whereas I shall live on to become a humdrum married person, to whom life is a bore.'

There was a pause. The silence was at last broken by Graham.

'I don't like to hear you talk like that,' he said, in a broken voice. 'Perhaps this is the last night we shall meet on this earth, and I should like to think of you at your best, as you have appeared to me now and then. You have been a bright star above my head — something I shall always remember as the best memory of my life.'


'Please don't talk sentiment.'

'Sentiment or no sentiment, it is God's truth,' returned Graham, solemnly. 'You know I have dared to love you well—treat

my love gently, not by approving it, but by being just to yourself.'

'How strangely you talk!'

'I feel strangely, for I came here to-night to say "good-bye." I want you, if you ever give me a thought, to think the best also of me. Forget my sullenness, my fits of passion, my infernal insolence; only remember how I respected and admired you, and how I tried to conquer my presumptuous passion. I *have* tried to conquer it, God knows! And you—you have been very kind. Where another lady would never have forgiven me, but would have hated and despised me for my insolence and my mad ways, you have taken it all so brightly and nobly, like the high-bred lady you are. Well, you have cured me better by your kindness than I could have hoped;




you have made another man of me ; and I see now how mad it was to dream of loving a lady like yourself. Not that I ever thought, even for a moment, that my love was anything but presumptuous. My God, no ! I knew from the beginning how hopeless it was, but for all that it was none the less sweet.'

He paused and gazed at her, his throat choked with emotion. She was listening quietly, with her face upturned to the starry sky.

'But don't think I wish the love had never come ; don't think that ! Take sweet and sour together, and the pleasure's more than the pain. You'll go away from this, and you'll marry another man, but I shall always have the dream of your bonnie face to comfort me. You cannot take that away,

and that's enough for me. I've looked in your face, and I've heard your voice, and I've held you in my arms, and what more should I dare to wish? Aye, and I've dared to tell you what I thought of you, and that's more comfort still. I walk the heather like a new man, I feel gently towards my fellow-men, I can pray more freely to my God—all through the love I've felt for *you!*

He had gone on speaking with a fluency he had never felt before, for the words had bubbled silently up from his heart like water trickling from a fountain in the ground; and as he proceeded, though his emotion was so deep, his speech had grown more and more calm. Now, however, he started and trembled, with a sudden thrill through the heart, for he felt, rather than saw, that she was weeping.



She did not move, but, leaning back as before, looked at the sky, while the tears flowed, and her delicate frame shook and quivered.

‘Miss Sedley ! for God’s sake don’t cry ! I am a wretch to pain you so !’

‘Don’t mind me !’ she said, with a sob ; ‘I think it does me good !’ and she hid her face in her hands.

He leant towards her, and watched her with strange tenderness as she wept in silence ; but soon the wave of grief subsided, the heart ceased to heave in tumult, and, drawing forth a delicate handkerchief, she dried her tears.

‘It is very stupid of me !’ she murmured ; ‘but I could not help it. I feel as if I had used you very badly.’

‘No, no !’



‘How much better it would have been if we had never seen each other. I seem doomed to bring misery to everyone I meet.’

‘You have brought no misery to me,’ he cried, though a voice in his wounded heart all the time echoed, ‘Misery, misery!’

‘I have! Oh, forgive me!’ she cried, stretching out her hands towards him.

The temptation was too much for him to bear. He seized her hands, and, lifting them to his lips, covered them with kisses. She trembled violently, but did not draw them away at first.

Then she sprang to her feet.

‘Let us go in,’ she exclaimed.

‘Ah, now I have made you hate me,’ said Graham, sadly.

‘I hate myself—I hate all the world; but not you!’

‘What!’

‘Do not say any more to me. Take pity upon me. Remember I am engaged to be married, and that I ought not to have listened to you at all.’

She moved towards the lighted door of the castle, Graham following. Rapture was again pre-eminent in his heart, for he felt now that, had fortune been kinder to him, she might have loved him. Yes, there was no mistaking her manner towards him. He had mastered her first aversion, and had made her fitful nature gentle as a lamb.

‘I forgot to ask you,’ she said, pausing on the threshold, ‘if you return to the manse to-night?’

‘No. My uncle and I are to sleep at a shepherd’s hut on the hill, and to-morrow

we are going to walk across the strand to Storport. I shall not return to Uribol till to-morrow night.'

She still lingered.

'When do you leave for the south?' he asked.

'Papa is anxious to go at once—in two or three days at the latest, I think.'

'Then I was right. I shall not see you again.'

'No.'

'Shall you return here after——'

'After!' she repeated, seeing that he paused.

'After your marriage?'

'Don't speak of anything so disagreeable,' she said with a forced laugh. 'I suppose, however, that I shall come back to Coreveolan some day.'

‘ Well, I shall not see you, for I shall be gone.’

‘ You are going away?’

‘ This place will be dull to me, and I shall go abroad—very likely to Canada or the States. I have often longed to try the New World, and I shall sail there as soon as I can.’

She answered nothing, but heaved a deep sigh, and then, slipping her little hand into his arm, she moved into the house. The sense of parting was upon them, and the heart of each was deeply stirred. Never before had they seemed quite so near to each other as in the sadness of that last adieu.

Wild streams of music were still issuing from the dancing-hall, and from time to time there arose loud shouts and laughter.

Ethel shrank back for a moment before she entered, then, resigning Graham's arm, and casting into his face one eager look, she passed in among the throng. Graham fell back like one dazed. He heard nothing—saw nothing. His head went round, and, sinking into a chair in a corner of one of the outer apartments, he hid his face in his hands.





## CHAPTER X.

ETHEL AND MINA.

**W**HILE Graham Macdonald, in a wild fever of excitement, was lingering outside the ball-room at Coreveolan Castle, with Ethel's last look upon his soul, and Lord Arranmore, moody, silent, and ill at ease, was thinking of the one being the want of whose animating presence made that gay scene almost a blank to him, Mina was trying to steep her soul in forgetfulness and to make the weary hours pass

pleasantly at the manse. She had asked her uncle for some work, and he had given her some copying to do—a philological article which he intended for some dry review—so, as soon as the two men were gone, Mina set to her task and worked as assiduously as if her very life depended upon its completion. She made some dreadful mistakes, but she was wholly unconscious of them, and toiled away proud of the manner in which she believed she was concentrating her thoughts and preventing them from straying to Coreveolan Castle.

An hour or so at the writing cramped her hand ; she put the paper aside for a while, and walked into the kitchen to see how Kirsty was getting on. On the previous day one of the gillies had come over from the castle, bringing the old woman an

invitation to the ball, written in the laird's own hand ; but, since Mina had decided not to go, Kirsty, with a very sore heart, had refused her invitation too. She would not leave her young mistress to spend a whole night, or part of a night, alone in the manse, yet she chafed terribly at the sacrifice, and proved herself a very unpleasant companion to Mina that night. But Mina, grown very weak in spirit, bore the complaints of the old domestic without a word. When she had done, she put her arm around her neck and kissed her cheek.

‘ You should have gone, Kirsty,’ she said.

The old woman was partly pacified.

‘ ’Tis not for the likes o’ me to go dancing o’er the country,’ she said, ‘ when a wee bairn like yoursel’ will choose to stay at hame. I’m no thinking o’ mysel’ or the



pleasure to mysel', but o' the insult till the laird. I'm thinkin', my bairn, if I should just walk o'er to the castle the morn and mak' my apologies till his lordship !'

Mina smiled. The idea of Lord Arranmore being pained by Kirsty's absence amused her.

'You need not be unhappy about that, Kirsty,' she said. 'I told Graham to make excuses for you, in case my uncle should forget.'

She remained a little longer in the kitchen, sometimes walking about with her hands behind her, sometimes pausing to watch Kirsty spin ; then she returned to her writing. Kirsty would talk of nothing but the ball, and that was the very thing which Mina was striving to forget. So the evening passed very wearily, and when ten

o'clock struck Mina was glad to go to bed. She felt depressed and sick at heart, and, once alone in her room, had great difficulty in keeping back her tears. She passed a weary, restless, feverish night ; and in the morning felt more sad at heart than she had ever done before.

She found a nice breakfast laid for her in her uncle's study. Kirsty, overcome with remorse at her ill-humour on the previous night, seemed anxious to atone, and did so by procuring little dainties to tempt Mina to eat. The sight of Mina's face shocked her ; it looked so white and thin ; there were dark rings round her eyes which told of mental suffering. Mina sat at the table and sipped a cup of tea, but she could not eat—the very sight of the food was nauseating to her. Then, when Kirsty had

cleared away the untouched dainties, she went over to her uncle's desk and tried to finish the work which he had given her to do. She worked steadily for some time; suddenly she threw her pen aside, let her head fall upon her hands, and burst into tears.

'God help me,' she sobbed. 'I think my heart is breaking. Oh, it's very cruel that I am bound to thole all this. He never loved me. He could not have loved me, or he would not continue to torture me so much. It is very cruel. If I could only die, and be at peace for ever up among the Uribol hills. God is not merciful, or He would let me die, since I have prayed for death so often. Well, they say people cannot live very long with a broken heart, and perhaps my troubles are almost done.'

Oh, I am very lonely! I did not think such sorrow was quite so hard to bear!

‘Good-morning, Miss Macdonald!’

Mina started, hurriedly wiped away her tears, and, rising to her feet, found herself standing face to face with Ethel Sedley. She stared; she could not speak; while Ethel, still standing with her right hand extended, said pleasantly:

‘Pray do not be angry with me. I know I have no right to intrude upon you unannounced like this. I knocked twice or thrice, and at last, receiving no answer, and finding the door open, I took the liberty of coming in.’

Still Mina stood in speechless amazement. At the best of times she would not have appreciated a visit from Miss Sedley, and the knowledge of how she had been dis-

covered annoyed her more than all. She knew that her cheeks were flushed, her eyes swollen with crying, and she was angry that Ethel should have seen her thus. Besides, she could never forget the fact that it was this woman who, after having made her brother's life desolate, had come between her and her love and wrought her all the pain.

So, although she saw Ethel's extended hand, she did not take it, but, drawing herself up proudly, said, as soon as she could command her voice sufficiently to speak :

'Miss Sedley, neither my uncle nor my brother is at home to-day, and I——'

She paused in some hesitation, too sensitive to utter the rude speech which forced

itself upon her tongue. Ethel smiled, and, closing the room door, walked straight up to Mina and took her hand.

‘Miss Macdonald,’ she said, very kindly, ‘I do not want either your uncle or your brother just now. I have come here with the sole object of seeing *you*.’

‘Me!’

‘Of course. When I heard that you would not come to me last night I made up my mind to come to you to-day. I have so much to tell you. Now do let us make ourselves comfortable. Will you not sit down? I’ve come to talk it over.’

Mina coldly withdrew her hand.

‘I do not understand you, madam,’ she said. ‘You are almost a stranger to me. If you wish to come here you had better do so when my uncle and brother are at home

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to receive you. To-day I would rather be alone.'

But Ethel was not to be daunted. Again she looked with a pleasant smile into Mina's face.

'I wish you'd trust me,' she said. 'Come, I'm not very formidable. Do sit down.'

'I will stand, if you please, until——'

'Well?'

'Until you are gone.'

After this speech there was silence. So many rebuffs were not very encouraging, but Ethel, having an earnest purpose in view, was not easily turned. Still it was very awkward; she had not anticipated quite so much coldness, and for the moment she hardly knew how to proceed. She had been sitting thinking, with her eyes fixed upon the ground; suddenly she raised them

to Mina's face. How wretchedly ill the girl looked! how terribly she must have suffered! and Ethel knew that all this suffering was traceable to her. She rose and again took Mina's hand.

'Miss Macdonald, do you know what brought me here to-day?'

'No, madam; nor do I wish to know!'

'I have come, then, to talk about your acquaintance with my cousin, Lord Arranmore.'

Mina's face flushed painfully. By a violent jerk she regained possession of her hand.

'I cannot!' she cried passionately. 'I *will* not—least of all with *you*!'

'Oh!'

'Lord Arranmore is nothing to me—I am nothing to him. We have met, but we



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are not likely to meet again. Why should I be persecuted by those who call themselves his friends? You are a great lady, and I am a poor girl; and this house is my house, and I beg you to leave it that I may have peace!

‘There, now, I have offended you.’

‘No; but, as I told you before, I wish to be alone. Pray go!’

‘What, *now*?’

‘Yes.’

Ethel rose, walked over to the window, and looked out.

‘The rain is falling in torrents,’ she said. ‘If I go, in ten minutes I shall be soaked to the skin. I promise to go as soon as the shower is over; until then *do* let me make myself at home. After all, I only come to give you a little advice.’

‘ I tell you I do not want it.’

‘ About Lawrance—Lord Arranmore I mean. He is going away.’

‘ Madam——’

‘ To the Antipodes,’ continued Ethel, fixing her eyes firmly upon Mina’s face. ‘ He has always had a hatred of monarchical government and a love for colonisation, so he means to transport himself and his opinions, for a time at least, to New Zealand.’

‘ To New Zealand,’ said Mina, trembling. ‘ Why, I understood that when he left Uribol he was going straight to London to be married.’

‘ Indeed—to whom?’

‘ To you.’

‘ *Me!*’

‘ Yes.’

‘May I ask who told you that fine tale?’

‘Your father!’

‘Then I am much obliged to my father for his impudence. Dismiss that notion from your mind, my dear—it’s absurd. To me Lawrie was always disagreeable in the extreme, so you need not be jealous of me.’


‘Jealous—I?’

‘Why not? isn’t that love’s privilege?’

‘You mistake me. I am not in love.’

‘Don’t say that again. It’s blasphemy against your cause, treason against your colours. I know you love Lawrie, though he doesn’t deserve it; and I tell you he would lay down his life for you. Will you sit down now, or shall I go?’

‘No—do not go!’



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‘ Ah, I thought we should be friends. And now that we are comfortable, I am going to give you a little advice, for I am quite an old woman—old in experience, you know, for in our world we measure time not by years, but by episodes. But first let me confess and crave absolution. Lawrie is not going to the Antipodes at all!’

‘ Not going?’

‘ No—that was merely a little invention of mine to find out whether or not you loved him, and could still forgive him all the cruel wrong that he has done to you. But to return to my story. Last night he was wretched because you did not come to the ball; so after the thing was over I asked him to come to my room and have a little private talk. He came, and I spoke to him like a mother. “ Lawrance,” I said,

“this engagement of ours, which was always absurd, is becoming tragical. We neither of us care for each other, and we both love somebody else. I see you mean to be honourable enough to keep your word to me, therefore I release you. There is your engagement-ring; the best thing you can do is to lose no time in giving one to Miss Macdonald!” ’

‘ You said that? But what did he say?’

‘ Well, my dear, he said nothing at first, but stared at me as if I were a revived corpse. Then he took the ring, shook me cordially by the hand, and paid me the compliment of saying he had never liked me so well in his life. “ But, Ethel,” he added, “ I am afraid my freedom comes too late. I have behaved like a villain to Miss Macdonald, and I fear she will never forgive

me!" Then he told me how coldly you had treated him lately, and I got frightened, and determined in my own mind to come down here this morning and ascertain if possible the real state of your feelings towards Lord Arranmore. . . . You love him, do you not, dear, and you will be his wife ?'

Mina started.

'His wife? Lord Arranmore's wife. Oh no, it cannot be; he is far above me.'

'I thought so at one time. As a rule equal should mate with equal, and when I first met you I did not think you his; but I know now that you are worthy a better man than he! I shall be proud to call you—cousin; and I am sure it will be the happiest day of Lawrance's life when you allow him to make you Lady Arranmore.'

Mina blushed, but said nothing this time.

She had drawn so much comfort from Ethel's talk that she was only too glad to sit and hear her speak on. As yet she could hardly bring herself to believe that all this was true—that it was not all a dream, from which on the morrow—nay, perhaps in a few hours—she would awake to find the world again grown dreary. Nevertheless, it was sweet while it lasted. So she sat and listened, growing each moment brighter; and when at length Ethel rose to go, Mina tearfully kissed her hand.

'No, that will not do,' said Ethel, quietly. 'Kiss me on the lips, my dear. I deserve it, I am sure. Why, I have only been here a couple of hours, and yet I have made you look at least ten years younger than you

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did when I came. So much for my skill in healing. Good-bye, love. Mind that you don't treat my cousin Lawrance as you wanted to treat me.'







## CHAPTER XI.

### A LITTLE SUNSHINE.

**I**N leaving the manse Ethel walked straight down to the shore. There she found awaiting her the boat which had brought her down that morning. She entered it at once, and ordered her boatmen to row her straight back to Coreveolan Castle.

The heavy rain had ceased to fall, but the day had not brightened much. A thick mist veiled all the hill-tops, the air was

clammy and rather cold, and a chill, fitful breeze was ruffling the surface of the sea. It was not a pleasant day to be out, but Ethel did not heed the weather. The chilly wind blew upon her—the water washed over the boat, saturating the thick ulster which she wore, but she took no heed ; her mind was too fully occupied with other things.

In thinking over the interview which she had just had, her feeling was one of self-congratulation. In freeing Lawrance and consoling Mina she knew that she had done well. She did not fear for them ; she knew that for them there were many years of happiness in store. But what of herself? She had no kind friend to intercede for her, no penitent to bring her lover to her feet. She knew that Graham Macdonald loved

her ; but what of that ? She felt almost certain that, although he loved her—although she had shown him, as plainly as a woman can show, that she loved him—he would never again ask her to be his wife. Yes, she felt certain of that, after what had taken place last night. If he had meant to ask her he would have asked her then—when she fully expected the question to be put by him, and was ready with her reply.

The men had rowed quickly, and by this time the boat was nearing the landing-stage which lay below Coreveolan Castle. The mist which had been blown down from the hill-tops thickened the air, and fell upon the earth in thin white rain. Ethel's clothes were saturated ; she felt very chilly ; so, as soon as she landed, she walked very quickly up to the castle. She entered with

her private key, and reached her room unperceived. Having exchanged her wet clothes for dry ones, she went downstairs, intending to find Lawrance and tell him what she had done. Her maid had told her that Lord Arranmore was somewhere in the castle, but for some time he was not to be found. She searched several rooms unsuccessfully ; she was passing along one of the lobbies towards the billiard-room when her quick ear caught the sound of two voices in eager conversation. The voices were those of her father and young Lord Arranmore.

‘I wonder what they’re talking about?’ said Ethel. ‘Perhaps Lawrie wouldn’t like to be disturbed. There won’t be much harm done if I listen for a moment just to hear.’

She gathered up the train of her dress and walked quietly back in the direction of the sounds ; they issued through the half-open door of a room which had been furnished up for her father's use, and called his study. Standing just outside, Ethel could hear the voices and see the men who were arguing together so warmly.

Sir Charles Sedley, flushed and angry-looking, paced the room with restless, irritable steps, while Lord Arranmore, leaning against the scarlet board of the chimney-piece, watched him in moody silence. They had ceased talking as Ethel stood before the door.

She was about to push it open and walk boldly in, when the conversation between the two men was begun again. Sir Charles paused before his nephew, and said:

‘Once for all, Lawrance, what do you mean to do?’

‘My dear uncle, if you will only calm yourself, and look at the matter like a sensible man, you will admit, I am sure, that I can do nothing. So long as Ethel wished to keep our compact, I did not say no, but I tell you she herself brought the engagement to a close.’

‘Brought the engagement to a close! Stuff and nonsense! I tell you I don’t believe she did any such thing. It’s not like Ethel. I dare say she talked in a wild, foolish way, as girls often will do, and then, to her amazement, you took her at her word. Do you think I am a blind old fool? Do you think I can’t see that this shameless, dishonourable conduct of yours is breaking my poor girl’s heart?’

‘ I tell you, uncle, Ethel does not care for me.’

‘ And I tell you she is ready to adore you at a moment’s notice if you will only encourage her by a little ordinary civility. But you won’t even do that. Now that you are infatuated by this Highland peasant girl, who under no circumstances could ever become your wife, poor Ethel, who has wasted all her life for you, may go to the wall. No, Lawrance, if you can’t love my poor girl as much as she deserves, at least don’t do her such vile injustice ; don’t altogether break her heart and ruin her young life. Go to her, tell her how heartily you repent of all this nonsense, and see if she doesn’t gleefully throw herself into your arms.’

As Sir Charles paused, Lord Arranmore

opened his lips to speak ; but the door of the room was quietly thrown open, and Ethel, the object of all this discussion, stood facing the two men. They both started ; Sir Charles flushed from brow to chin, then nervously grasped the back of a chair which stood near. Lord Arranmore, looking somewhat uncomfortable, but not quite so guilty as his uncle, straightened himself up from his lounging attitude, and took a few steps towards the girl.

‘Ethel!’ he exclaimed, ‘you here! Why, they told us that you were on the hills.’

For a minute or so Ethel could say nothing. Anger, shame, and mortified pride kept her silent. Her face was white as death, her lips were quite bloodless, her hands trembling. Never in his life had



Lawrance seen her so moved, and he grew really alarmed.

‘Ethel,’ he said, ‘my dear cousin, do not excite yourself so much. What is the matter?’

‘The matter? Not much,’ said Ethel, forcing her white lips into a smile. Then taking her cousin’s hand, and utterly ignoring the presence of her father, she said :

‘Lawrance, when you and I parted last night I thought—if it is not possible for us to love, we can at least respect one another. I wonder if you will ever be able to respect me after the conversation which you have had with my father to-day.’

‘Ethel!’

‘Nay, do not speak. I know what your kind heart prompts you to say, Lawrance; but nothing that you could say or do will

ever wipe from my memory the shame of to-day. It is unpardonable. To think that my father, who of all men should love and respect me, should take such shameful liberties with my name. To think that he of all men should hawk me about as if I were some negro slave to be put up for sale in the market-place, and knocked down to the first person who chooses to pay the price.'

Here Sir Charles Sedley, who had by this time recovered his presence of mind, came forward to where his daughter stood.

'Ethel,' he said, 'for pity's sake don't make a fool of yourself by going on like a tragedy queen in a play. It strikes me we've had enough posing and speechifying lately; it's high time you began to talk a little common sense!'

Instead of answering her father Ethel turned again to Lord Arranmore, who, deeming his presence a superfluity, had moved towards the door.

‘Lawrance,’ she said, ‘I have something to say to you by-and-by. I suppose you’re not going out?’

‘No, you will find me in my room until dinner-time.’

Then he went, glad of a chance to escape and leave father and daughter alone.

To tell the truth, he was half ashamed of the part which he was compelled to play in this domestic drama, and he felt he would give a good deal to bring these unpleasant scenes to a close. Every day some new phase of ill-feeling was sure to spring up somewhere, and it seemed to him that in the end this eternal playing at cross purposes

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would serve to alienate the friendship of everyone. Ethel was right ; if people could not love one another, there was no reason whatever why respect and affection should be abandoned. Yet so it was ; the breaking of his engagement seemed likely not only to put an end to all friendly affection between himself and Ethel, but now, through some ridiculous accident, threatened to imperil the kindly feelings which had always existed between Sir Charles Sedley and his child.

Lord Arranmore had reached the door of his room, when he turned and walked back to that in which he had left his uncle and cousin. They were still there. Sir Charles was seated in an easy-chair, looking repentant and miserable enough, while Ethel, who had turned her back upon him, stood

looking out of the window with her forehead pressed against the cold panes of glass.

Lord Arranmore walked up to his cousin and took her hand.

‘Ethel,’ he said, ‘I have come back to be peacemaker. Come, you must not quarrel with your father, least of all through me. I have caused misery enough during the last month or so without having that upon my conscience. What if he did speak a little warmly? It was all the result of his affection for you. Shake hands, uncle,’ he added, turning to Sir Charles. ‘Some day you will have a better son-in-law than I am. If Ethel and I have made up our minds not to marry, remember we are still cousins—almost brother and sister—and we must not allow ourselves to be separated for the sake

of a stupid blunder which only wants a little explanation to set it right.'

For a while father and daughter remained stubborn, but at length the persuasions of the young lord won upon them, and they kissed each other and agreed to try and forget.

The baronet's greatest trouble at this time was the thought of Graham Macdonald, for in him he seemed to see the stumbling-block to his daughter's marriage with Lord Arranmore. When, therefore, the shock of the news of the broken engagement was over, the baronet calmly awaited that other blow which he believed his daughter was preparing for him—the announcement of her engagement to Graham Macdonald. But the blow did not come, and after a while the baronet began to think it was

not likely to do so. Instead of wandering about the hills as she used to do, Ethel kept continually in the house, and remained hour after hour shut up in her room, under the pretext of helping her maid to prepare for her departure. She was affectionate in her manner to her father, friendly and quite unrestrained with Lawrance; but there was a dreamy look in her eyes, a strange preoccupation in her manner, which neither could understand. One night, as she and her father sat alone in the drawing-room at Coreveclan Castle, her father called her to him and kissed her.

‘Are your things all ready for to-morrow, my love?’

‘Quite ready, papa.’

‘That is right, dear. I am rather glad we are going so soon. An overdose of

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this Highland air is making you look pale. I suppose you'll be glad to get away?'

'I suppose I shall.'

'You speak as if you didn't know your own mind, Ethel.'

'I sometimes fancy I do not. How stupid of me. I have set this wound bleeding again.'

'It is a long time getting well. It couldn't take much longer if you tore it open every day.'

'No, it couldn't, could it?' she said, with a laugh; then, bending down to kiss him, she said: 'Good-night, papa. I have one or two little things to do before I can go to bed, so I will retire, as we have to rise so early in the morning.'

The baronet kissed her, and she left the



room. In the hall she was met by one of the footmen, who told her that the young man from Usher manse had called to see her. He was in the dining-room. Ethel walked straight there and found Graham. He rose as she came in.

‘I heard this afternoon that you leave to-morrow, Miss Selley,’ he said, ‘and I called to wish you a safe journey and to say good-bye.’

‘Yes, we leave to-morrow,’ she said. ‘It was very kind of you to call. How is your sister?’

‘Much better, thanks.’

‘Have you seen Lord Arranmore?’

‘I left him just now at the manse.’

‘Oh, indeed! He’s gone to say good-bye, I suppose. Such a lot of leave-taking when one is going away. Well, Mr. Mac-

donald, if we both live long enough I suppose we shall meet again ?

‘ I hope so.’

‘ Will you come and say good-bye to papa ? He is in the drawing-room.’

Graham assented, and was at once marshalled into the presence of Sir Charles Sedley.

The baronet was affable, condescending, and most polite. He desired to be very kindly remembered to all at the manse, and hoped if any of them ever happened to be in town, they would pay him a visit. As the baronet forgot to add in what quarter of London he and his daughter were ever likely to be found, Ethel handed him a card bearing their town address. Sir Charles frowned, but said nothing, and Graham at

once wished him good-night. Ethel went with him to the door.

‘Give my love to your uncle and Mina,’ she said; ‘be sure you don’t forget, now. Good-night—good-bye. You have got a very weary walk home.’

He took her hand in both of his, and raised it to his lips. Then, without a word, he left her. Ethel walked wearily upstairs, and sat down alone in her room.

‘It seems to me that I have played the fairy, and made everybody happy,’ she said. ‘Oh for some good fairy to wave her wand over *me!*’





## CHAPTER XII.


### A PROPOSAL.

**E**THEL SEDLEY had indeed played the part of the good fairy in the play during her last visit to Uribol manse. Later in the afternoon, when Mr. Macdonald and Graham got home, they found Mina looking brighter than she had done for months ; moving about the house with her old light, fairy-like tread, and now and then humming over snatches of song.

It was wonderful how this change in the girl brightened the whole house. Mina's dog, catching the spirit of his mistress, frisked wildly about the girl, and gave little shakes at her dress whenever she went and came. Kirsty's spinning-wheel seemed to hum more blithely, and every room looked as if it had been brightened by the sudden shining of the midsummer sun.

Mina knew pretty well when her uncle and brother would be home, and she had tea ready for them ; and when the meal was over she opened the windows, for the evening was quite fine, drew up two easy-chairs for the two men, and, taking her seat between them, asked them to tell her all about the ball.

Graham said little, but Mr. Macdonald, delighted at this change in the girl, told her



all. Then Mina produced her copy, laughed heartily over the mistakes which she had made, and promised to do every line of it again. Her brother looked at her in puzzled silence, and, as soon as they were alone, asked her what it all meant.

The clergyman, being tired, had retired early, leaving the brother and sister in the study alone. The lamps had not been lit, but a flood of bright moonlight pouring into the room illuminated with a pale, soft radiance the two figures still seated by the open window.

‘Mina,’ said Graham, quietly, ‘what has happened since yesterday?’

‘Miss Sedley has been here.’

‘Ethel—Miss Sedley?’

‘Yes, indeed. She came over from the castle this morning, and stayed nearly two

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hours. Do you know, Graham, that she has broken off her engagement with Lord Arranmore ?

‘ She told you that ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ And said that his lordship intended to propose to you ? ’

‘ No, she did not.’

‘ She has done the same thing, Mina ; she has made you believe so. Well, remember if he does so, that your birth is as good as his, but that under no circumstances whatever will he ever regard you as his equal.’

Mina was silent. She had not expected the conversation to take this turn. Hitherto she had been quite frank with Graham, but now she felt that she would much rather have him leave her love affairs alone. His

own were complicated enough. Why not try to disentangle them? So, instead of answering his question, she bent forward to look into his face, and said quietly :

‘Graham, Miss Sedley is a free woman now!’

‘What of that, Mina?’

‘She loves you. She almost told me as much to-day!’

‘About as much as she loved me a year ago, when she treated me with such scorn.’

‘She did not! she could not! If you were to ask her *now*, she would be your wife!’

‘My *wife*! Ha! ha! ha!’

‘Don’t laugh like that, Graham. Is it so amusing?’

‘Very. The idea of Miss Sedley becoming a wife. She is one of those ladies one



meets occasionally in the world who is forever craving for the impossible. The moment I show my love, she repulses me. When I cool, she encourages me again. But I'm too old to be a woman's plaything now. I can better afford to remain her friend!

'You are too hard upon her, Graham.'

'Tit for tat, Mina. She was once too hard upon me.'

Nothing more passed between them that night, but the short conversation had had more effect upon Graham than he cared to show. For hours after Mina had gone to bed he sat by the window, pressing his heated head between his hands, and thought over what he had heard. When he had spoken so callously to Mina he had simply done so to hide from her the real state of

his heart. He felt that Ethel loved him ; he knew that he loved her ; but he dreaded to speak lest his words should bring into her face the cold, proud look which he had seen there before.

Meanwhile active preparations were on foot for the departure of the party from the castle, and Mina was wondering each day why Lord Arranmore had not paid a visit to the manse. After what Ethel had said she fully expected him, and, although she pined to see him, she seemed to dread his coming. At last, however, when Mina began to think that he had given up all thoughts of seeing her, he came. It was the evening before the day on which the party at the castle were to take their departure from Uribol. The family at the manse were seated at tea when they saw Lord

Arranmore walk past the window, and a minute or so after he was ushered into the room by Kirsty.

The clergyman received him cordially, for the young man had become a great favourite with him; Graham gave him a more than usually friendly handshake; while Mina, who, with all her self-control, could not keep the tell-tale colour from rising to her cheeks, gave him her hand too. How kindly he took it! how warmly he pressed it! Then he gratefully accepted the offer of a cup of tea, and sat down amongst them as if he were one of themselves.

It seemed to Mina that the old times had come back again—the dear old times when she had walked about the world in a dim, delicious dream, from which she had been destined to have such a sorrowful awaken-

ing. There sat Lawrance, just as he had been wont to sit, sipping his cup of tea and gazing upon her with eyes that bespoke his admiration, and Mina felt that she was blushing and trembling just as she had been wont to do before the intensity of that gaze.

‘I am glad, Miss Macdonald, to see you more like yourself’ than when I was here before.’

‘Thank you, my lord, I am quite recovered now.’

She spoke quietly, laying slight stress on his title, as if to remind herself of his rank. She felt that she needed to do so. His greatness seemed to have fallen from him that night, and transformed him into the poor young student who had come to them some months ago. Lawrance winced

slightly at the title thus emphatically bestowed upon him, and turned to Mr. Macdonald.

‘If you remember,’ he said, ‘I bade you good-bye once before, and nothing came of it. But I am really going this time. I leave Uribol to-morrow.’

‘I hope you will soon return, my lord.’

‘I hope so too. It is necessity, not inclination, which takes me away now. As I told your nephew a few days since, I should not mind if I had to spend my life here.’

As he spoke Lord Arranmore looked at Mina, but she had turned to arrange some things on the table, and he could not see her face.

Mina now dropped out of the conver-

sation altogether, for the clergyman and Lord Arranmore began a long discussion about the land question. In the midst of it Kirsty came in to say the minister was wanted in the kitchen. With many apologies Mr. Macdonald left the room, and Lord Arranmore, glancing quickly about him, saw that he was alone with Mina. In a moment he was by her side.

‘Miss Macdonald—Mina!’

At this sudden impassioned address Mina felt her hands begin to tremble, her cheeks to blush. She lifted her head, and raised her eyes confidently to his.

‘My lord?’

He bent towards her, and took both her hands in his.

‘Do you know what has brought me

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here to-night, Mina? I have come to ask you to become my wife!"

At this Mina blushed more vividly than ever, but she could not reply, for at that moment the door of the sitting-room opened, and the minister returned. Lord Arranmore dropped her hands and frowned, but his frown soon cleared away. Mr. Macdonald came to apologise again. He had some business to attend to which would occupy him for a quarter of an hour or so—would Lord Arranmore excuse him for that time? He had hunted for Graham, thinking that he would entertain his lordship, but the lad had disappeared, and was nowhere to be found. However, Lord Arranmore, who seemed to be very accommodating that night, expressed himself perfectly willing to be left alone with

Mina, and the minister retired. Then Lawrance, remembering that he had only a quarter of an hour before him, again approached her.

‘ You have had a visit from Ethel, have you not ?’

‘ Yes, Miss Sedley came down to see me the morning after the ball.’

Then Mina, glad of a reprieve, launched out into such praise of Ethel that Lawrance smiled.

‘ I am glad you like her. You two will have to be fast friends. She will be your cousin, you know !’

‘ My lord !’

‘ There, do not call me that — say Lawrance ; but I forgot, you have not answered my question. Well, Mina, which is it to be ? Yes—or no ?’



‘No.’

Lord Arranmore started, and looked at the girl’s bowed head and pale face in blank amazement.

‘Mina—Miss Macdonald—do you know what you have said?’

‘Perfectly, my lord!’

‘You refuse to marry me?’

Mina did not answer this time; she only bowed her head.

‘Is it because you do not love me? Is it because you think I have treated you like a scoundrel? Tell me, my darling, what has changed you so?’

‘My lord, I am not changed.’

‘But you are, I say. Nine months ago if I had asked you to marry me, you would not have hesitated for a single hour.’

‘Ah, but you were different then, or I

thought you different. I could have married Mr. Lawrance, the student, but I cannot marry Lord Arranmore.'

'And yet they are both the same.'

'To you, maybe, but not to me. In Mr. Lawrance I should have found my equal. Lord Arranmore, the laird of Uribol, can only remain a friend who is far above me. My lord, you are always very kind, and I hope this will not put an end to our friendship. I thank you for the honour you have done me, but, believe me, it is better for us to remain as we are.'

'And so, because you have got this idea of inequality in your head, you deny me the only thing which will make my life worth living. Mina, if you loved me you would not talk like this.'

'It is because I love you that I say it.'

There was silence for a moment, then Lawrance, taking her trembling hands in his, pleaded his cause so eloquently, that for the moment she forgot the events of the last few months, and thought that the young student who had so effectually won her heart was again before her with his honeyed words of love.

Presently she spoke.

‘Do you think,’ she said, ‘that your love for me will last a year?’

‘It will last all my life.’

‘Well then, listen. If in one year from this day you feel that you would like to marry me, come back to Uribol and ask me, and maybe I will say yes.’

‘One year—Mina, it will be an eternity to me!’

‘You will not consent?’

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‘My darling, I would consent to anything which would help me to win your hand. So be it—I consent. Mina, at the end of one year I shall come back again.’

Mina smiled.

‘At the end of three months, my lord, you will have forgotten Uribol and forgotten me.’

‘You think that ; well, you shall see.’

When the minister returned to the room he found Lord Arranmore ready to go. As he had already said good-night to Mina, he cordially shook the clergyman’s hand and took his leave.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### COREVEOLAN IS DESERTED.

**T**HE day after the parting of Mina and Lord Arranmore, the Highland steamer *Quiraing* 'laid to' off Castle Coreveolan, and took on board the whole party, masters and servants, with all their bag and baggage.

Large numbers of people lined the shore, while the great northern skiffs took the luggage on board; then, as Lord Arranmore and his friends were rowed out, cheer after cheer ascended into the air.

Standing on the gangway of the dingy vessel, Ethel gazed shoreward through slowly gathering tears. She had been dreaming of Graham since their parting the day previous, and up to the last she had hoped that he would re-appear. When he did not come, and while the hours went rapidly by, and brought the time of her departure, her soul was sad indeed.

The sun was bright that day, though the weather was bleak and cold. Clad in seal-skin jacket and sealskin hat to match, with dainty boots bordered round the ankle with the same material, she looked her very best; and it was lucky for her lover's peace of mind that he did not see her.

But if he did not see her beauty from close at hand, he could at least see the vessel which was bearing her away. On

the top of one of the highest hills above Coreveolan, invisible to all the eyes below, Graham was standing. Gazing downward through the sunlight, he saw the calm sea wrinkling into innumerable creeks and coves; then the steamer, dwarfed to the size of a skiff, crawling along the coast till it halted off Coreveolan; then the people, small as mice, upon the shore, and the tiny boats creeping out heavily laden to the steamboat's side. Straining his ears he fancied he could hear a faint sound as of human voices, but he was not sure.

Presently he saw the water whiten behind the steamboat; her paddles were moving, and with the long string of black smoke behind her, she was crawling out to the open sea. Solitary, desolate, despairing, Graham stood on the mountain and watched

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her go. Smaller and smaller she grew in the distance ; and at last a pale mist, which was creeping in from the ocean, obliterated her wholly from his sight. He strained his eyes in vain ; only wreaths of smoke, still hovering far behind upon her track, showed where she had been.

Nevertheless he did not stir yet. He stood like a marble man, his eyes fixed upon the spot where she had disappeared.

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Still standing on the gangway, Ethel saw the frowning cliffs of that stormy coast fade away, then she looked around her, and saw her father standing close by, with a face full of gloom, while Lord Arranmore, cigar in mouth, was pacing up and down.

She beckoned to the latter.

‘ What are your plans ? ’ she said.



‘I shall go straight to Edinburgh, where I have some business to transact with our family solicitors; then, I think, to Paris.’

‘When do you think of returning to Coreveolan?’ she asked quietly.

‘Not until next summer.’

She was silent, looking sadly towards the shore. He glanced round towards the spot where Sir Charles was standing, and then said in a low voice:

‘I have something to tell you.’

‘Yes, Lawrance?’

‘Now that it is all over between us, I think you will be glad to hear I have asked Mina Macdonald to become my wife.’

‘You have?’ she said, looking up in surprise.

‘Yes; I went over yesterday. I saw her alone—she spoke much of you, of your

goodness, your sympathy — then I spoke of myself, and asked her to marry me——’

He paused nervously.

‘Yes?’ she exclaimed, looking up in his troubled face.

‘And she refused me.’

‘No!’

‘It is a fact, Ethel. She thanked me for what she called the honour I did her, but declined to accept it.’

With a little laugh of delight Ethel clapped her hands together. Then looking slyly up in her cousin’s face, she exclaimed:

‘I admire her spirit. You have got just what you deserve. I told her when I spoke to her about you that she was far too good for you, and you see she is precisely of my opinion.’

‘And she is right,’ said the young man firmly.

‘But has she positively refused you point-blank, I mean?’ said Ethel, with more concern than she had at first shown. ‘You seem to bear it very well, if it is so.’

‘I’ll tell you,’ replied Lawrance, with a quiet smile. ‘She refuses me for the present, but she has given me this much consolation—she promises that if I come again in a year, and she is still unmarried she will think it over.’

‘I see—a year’s probation!’

‘She told me candidly that she did not expect me to remember her ten days after I left Uribol. I am afraid she has a very low opinion of me, chiefly because I belong to the aristocracy.’

‘That shows her good sense,’ said Ethel

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quietly taking her cousin's arm, and walking with him up and down. 'But now, tell me, Lawrance, do you seriously think of returning and marrying this person?'

'Most seriously—most solemnly.'

'And you think you will be happy—if you marry her, I mean?'

'As the ancients said, I leave *that* to the gods.'

'She is your inferior socially.'

'Of course.'

'I have heard it said by clever people that a woman can raise a man to any level, but that it is impossible for a man to raise a woman. Take a female from the gutter and the taint of the gutter will always cling to her; whereas a man, though born and bred in a ditch, may become anything he pleases, and never show a trace of his

origin. Do you believe that, Lawrance?’

‘I don’t believe it; but even if I did——’

‘It would not apply to Miss Macdonald. No, you are right.’

‘The Macdonalds, you know, though fallen upon dark days, belong to the best blood in the Highlands. If things were as they ought to be, young Graham would be a chieftain in his own right.’

As he said this Lawrance watched his companion closely, and he saw the bright blood mount to her cheek.

‘I dare say,’ she returned carelessly; ‘but in this world we have to deal with things not as they ought to be, but as they are. The Macdonalds are good people, but hardly up to your form, from the world’s point of view.’

‘The world?—I am sick of it.’

‘But you’re going back to it.’

‘No fault of mine, as I have explained. You see, Ethel, I am quite as frank with you as you were with me. I hope you’re not offended.’

‘Oh dear, no! Only look at papa—I’m afraid he is.’

Lawrance looked at Sir Charles, who was at that moment gazing at the sea with an expression very like a person in the first stage of sea-sickness. He was supremely and utterly disgusted with the failure of all his plans. The world seemed becoming topsy-turvy; all, he reflected, through that ‘d——d Radicalism’ which was rapidly poisoning society. He had come to the Highlands hoping to combine business with pleasure; to enjoy some very good shoot.

ing. and to complete the matrimonial scheme on which he had set his heart. Everything had gone against him. Everybody seemed to have become infected with a state of feeling to which Chartism was child's play. First, Lawrance had set common sense and decency at defiance by running after a person who was little better than a milkmaid or an upper housemaid. Under his infatuation he had practically broken his engagement. Then, to crush all, Ethel had taken his part, and deliberately broken with him. Had it entered into the worthy baronet's head that she had done so because she seriously cared for young Graham Macdonald, he would have had no hesitation in believing her fit to be incarcerated in a lunatic asylum.

Still, now that they had fairly left the

wilderness of Uribol behind them, the worthy baronet did not quite despair. He saw the young people talking earnestly, and he determined to leave them as much together as possible. Future intercourse, under more conventional conditions, might re-unite them and save the honour of the family.

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Meanwhile Graham Macdonald crossed the hills to Uribol, and, entering the manse quietly, heard the voice of Mina singing a verse of an old Scotch song. The tone was happy, almost gay, and he listened in surprise. Entering his uncle's study, he saw his sister sitting at the window sewing, and singing as she sewed.

She looked up with a bright face as he entered, and ceased her song.



‘Well, they have gone,’ he said, throwing himself into a chair. ‘I saw them sail away.’

He waited for some expression of pain or regret, but none came. Mina was looking quietly out at the sea, and her face was quite calm.

‘I hope they will have a pleasant sail,’ she said simply. ‘Koll says we are to have good weather.’

He started up with an exclamation.

‘I cannot make you out,’ he cried. ‘When the young laird was here you moped after him day and night; now that he has gone, you seem quite merry. Are you glad that he has left you?’

‘Maybe he’ll come back,’ said Mina.

‘Never! We have seen the last of them all. Why do you smile?’

Then Mina told him of what had taken place before Arranmore departed—of how he had asked her to become his wife, and how, when she held back, he had sworn fidelity, and had promised to ask her again ‘in a year.’

‘And you believe that he will keep his word?’ said Graham.

‘Maybe,’ again said Mina; ‘but even if he does not, I shall know that it is better for us both. I am quite content.’

‘You are a strange lass. Any other in your place would have been greeting and mourning.’

‘Why should I mourn? I mourned when I thought he despised me, and when I thought he had been unkind. Now that I know how good he is, and how much he has cared for me, I am proud and glad.’

Graham looked at his sister for some minutes, then rising, he bent over her chair and kissed her gently on the forehead.

‘I wish I had your heart,’ he said; ‘I wish I could bear my cross like you. You are braver than I am, Mina. But you have something at least to console you; I have nothing. That lady filled my life. Now that she is gone I feel like a boat adrift without an oar or a sail.’

‘Did you say good-bye?’

‘A last one. O God! I shall never see her again!’

And the strong man hid his face in his hands and sobbed.

After that the old life went slowly and wearily on. The iron hand of Winter was now outstretched over the north, and dreary days of rain and hail began. Storms came,

with intervals of cheerless calm. With a strength born of a faithful and constant nature, Mina went back to her old ways—read and studied with her uncle, wandered by the shore, visited the sick and comforted the poor. ‘The love-sickness,’ as Doctor John called it, seemed to have only left her stronger and purer. To her the world was full of a new hope, and the thought of her lover comforted her as it had never comforted her before.

But the spirit of Graham fretted in passionate unrest. He took no interest in the place or in any of its outdoor occupations. Sometimes, indeed, he took his gun and wandered out in pursuit of wild-fowl, but he generally returned empty-handed, weary, and taciturn. Occasionally he would

lift a book, but even as he held it in his hand his thoughts would wander far away. Mina watched him in pain, trying her utmost to console and comfort him ; while the old minister, quite unconscious of the state of affairs, attributed his strange moods to the natural restlessness of an idle disposition.

At last one day he announced his intention of going south and resuming his studies in Edinburgh. The minister approved, but looked less pleased when Graham explained that he had finally abandoned all thoughts of entering the Church.

‘I am not fit to be a minister,’ said Graham ; ‘I have neither the heart nor the head. I think I shall prepare for the civil-service, and try for an appointment abroad.’

‘It is a lottery,’ observed Mr. Macdonald, ‘and you will find it harder work than the other.’

‘What else can I do? I should like to enter the army, but I cannot become a common soldier, and I am too poor to purchase a commission.’

‘How much does it cost?’ asked the minister, thoughtfully.

‘Some hundreds of pounds—I’m not quite sure how much; but of course it’s out of the question.’

‘Maybe not,’ returned his uncle. ‘I think it could be managed, if I were quite certain that you would be more faithful to this calling than the other. I have a little money put by—more than enough, I think, for the purpose; and although I am myself a man of peace, I believe the profession of

a soldier, nobly followed, to be honourable and just. Your forbears were soldiers, Graham! They fought on the losing side, but they lived and died like good men and true. If you were to become like one of them I think I should be well-content.'

The project, thus accidentally broached, grew in the minds of both Graham and his uncle. Inquiries were made, and the minister ascertained that the price of a commission was well within his means, and that he could annually afford a small sum—trifling, but sufficient with strict economy—to supplement a subaltern's pay. His heart bounding with gratitude to his uncle, Graham went south to make more definite inquiries, and to select a suitable regiment. Before long he wrote home in high spirits,

saying that he had passed the preliminary examination with ease, and that he had arranged for the purchase of a commission in the —th regiment of Highland foot.







## CHAPTER XIV.

### ETHEL SPEAKS THE EPILOGUE.

**L**ESS than one year after Lord Arranmore and the Sedleys left Coreveolan, and sailing away southward, were watched from the lonely mountains by the desolate eyes of Graham Macdonald, Graham sat one afternoon in the coffee-room of a small inn in the outskirts of the town of Brieg, at the foot of the Simplon. He had only just arrived by diligence, and having hurried to the post-

office and procured his letters, was reading them at the window of the room.

Far away in the distance were the snowy ranges of the Alps—clear and distinct against a daffodil sky; but as he read, he saw in his mind's eye other and sadder mountains in their dreary garment of northern mist and rain.

Over one letter, written in a clear and flowing hand, he lingered eagerly and long, for it contained news which brought the eager blood to his cheek, and made his eye flash fire. At last he folded it up, and rising, gazed up darkly at the silent mountain range.

‘So Mina is happy,’ he said to himself; ‘her dream has come true, and her faith is justified. She will be the Lady of Arranmore, and I shall be alone in all the world.’

Well, thank God for it !' She deserves her happiness. She is a good lass ; she has dree'd her weird, and it has all come right at last.'

Here the waiter of the inn, a very small but preternaturally old youth, entered, and with much effusion inquired at what hour monsieur would dine.

'At the table-d'hôte, whenever it was served,' said Graham.

'Pardon, but there was no table-d'hôte. It was so late in the year, and it had been abandoned since the summer. Monsieur was alone in the hotel with the exception of a young countrywoman of monsieur, who had ordered dinner at six precisely. Perhaps monsieur would dine at the same hour ?'

'Certainly,' said Graham. 'Meanwhile,

bring me the visitors' book to pass the time.'

Thereupon the waiter fetched an unclean-looking volume and placed it on the table before the guest. Graham turned it over carelessly, amusing himself with the absurd entries made by idiotic travellers of all nations and all dispositions. Suddenly he started as if he had been shot, for on a blank page was written, in an elegant hand :

*'Miss Sedley and Monsieur Wolf—en route to Basle.'*

He sprang up and rang the bell. The very small waiter appeared, smiling.

'What is the description of the young lady who is staying here at present?—Miss Sedley—I see it written down here.'

'Yes, that is the name,' said the waiter.

‘A *young* lady, I presume?’

‘Young and *très gentille*, but pardon, *très excentrique*,’ opined the little waiter. ‘She had been staying in the inn for a week, and had occupied herself in long walks up towards the Pass and on the mountains. They were rather alarmed on her account at present, because it was past the hour for her return, and she had not taken—it was her custom never to take—a guide.’

‘But she is not alone,’ observed Graham. ‘The gentleman who is with her——’

The little waiter looked puzzled, until Graham pointed to the entry in the book.

‘Who is Monsieur Wolf?’ he inquired.

‘Pardon, but monsieur was the dog? It was the custom of mademoiselle to be accompanied by a large hound of the boar-hound species, which slept at her chamber

door and accompanied her in all her promenades. But it was strange,' continued the little waiter, going to the window and looking out, 'that mademoiselle had not returned. If she had lost her way upon the mountain, or if snow had fallen——'

'You think she is in danger?' cried Graham, seizing his hat from the table.

'Not exactly in danger, perhaps, but monsieur and madame were both alarmed on her account. Monsieur might see them now standing at the door and looking up towards the mountains. Mademoiselle was as a rule so punctual, and snow had fallen during the night.'

Without another word Graham hurried down to the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

A black speck upon the snow, far up on

the Simplon Road. It is moveless ; but not far from it is another small speck moving. Graham sees both as he climbs the mountain.

Coming nearer, after a long and weary climb, he sees that one is a human figure, sitting as if wearied out, and that the other is a large dog.

The sunset is blood-red in the snow, and night will come suddenly, when the sun sinks quite behind the hills.

He comes closer. He shouts and waves his cap. The dog barks, and the lady, raising her head, shows the face of Ethel Sedley. She does not recognise him, but rises slowly, as if fatigued.

But when he comes close up and names her by her name, she knows him, and reaches out both her hands.

‘*You!*’ she cries. ‘How did you come here? Have you been sent to look for me?’

Graham rapidly explains—how he has discovered her presence in the neighbourhood, and how, alarmed at the anxiety of the innkeeper, he has come up to search for her himself.

‘I think I lost my way,’ says Ethel; ‘but Wolf is a splendid guide, and would have brought me home. I was only resting when you arrived.’

She leant upon his arm, and they descended together, the dog running races before them on the mountain-side. Presently she says, smiling up at him :

‘How strange that we should meet *so!* You seem to be constituted my special preserver.’



‘ Ah ! fortunately you were in no danger this time.’

‘ I think I must have been ; indeed, I’ll *try* to think so, for I like the idea. Are you not astonished to find me wandering about alone ? Papa, who has been very disagreeable lately, has gone to Canada with Lord Belford, and I have been travelling about.’

‘ Alone ! unprotected !’

‘ I have Wolf—Monsieur Wolf. Besides, who would molest an old maid like me ! But what brings you to Switzerland ?’

‘ I came over for a holiday, after many months of hard work. I have entered the army.’

‘ The army ! Then my Highland chieftain has found his *métier* at last.’

‘ What’s that ?’

‘ Leading forlorn-hopes and rescuing

females in distress. How is your sister? Stop! you need not tell me. I have heard all about it from Lawrance himself.'

\* \* \* \* \*

The little waiter is in high glee as he serves the dinner for two, and sees the English monsieur and English mademoiselle eating amicably together. He smiles upon the lady like a father, and he recommends the dishes to the gentleman with the cordiality of a brother. It is something in the dull season to see such pleasant company.

For the first time in their lives Graham and Ethel sit together as equals—as equal man and woman. She is no longer the great lady, he the somewhat sullen Highlander. They are fellow-travellers, each

under the care and blessing of the little waiter.

After coffee they are left alone. Ethel is unconcerned, but Graham looks uncomfortable.

There is a long silence, broken by Ethel.

‘After all,’ she observes thoughtfully, ‘this sort of thing can’t go on for ever!’

‘Unfortunately, no!’ cries Graham, misunderstanding her.

‘I mean, it would be quite ridiculous for you to spend your life in meeting me by accident, and rescuing me from danger.’

‘I should delight in such a life.’

‘But it would be highly absurd.’

‘Not so, it would be Paradise.’

She smiles, and relapses again into

silence. She watches him intently for a time, and her next remark, when it comes, startles him.

‘Don’t you smoke?’

He stammers ‘Yes—but——’

‘Then oblige me by lighting a cigar?’

At her entreaty he rings the bell, and orders a cigar from the little waiter. He blushes and frowns, and will not light it; but she is firm, and at last he puts it into his mouth. His confusion is perfect when she strikes a wax-light and holds it to the cigar’s end. Then he laughs and lights the cigar, but smokes it reluctantly, as if fearing to pollute her presence.

‘Pray enjoy your cigar,’ she says, ‘and remember I like it. Papa has seasoned me, and I have smoked a cigarette myself.’

It seems as if she were resolved, by one means or another, to reduce the social distance between them ; but the more she advances, the more he retires into himself, for the familiarity is almost more than he can bear. He remembers the capriciousness of her moods, and how, once or twice, when he has been led to encroach, she has stabbed him with her unexpected scorn.

‘ Mr. Macdonald,’ she says presently, ‘ it is Leap year.’

‘ Leap year ?’

‘ Yes. Well, listen to me, and please don’t scowl so, for I want you to be very amiable. Last year you told me you rather liked me.’

‘ Please don’t speak of it.’

‘ I was a giddy girl, and I played with

you ; when you went too far I said you were impertinent, because we were not equals.'

'I knew it, and I know it. Why open up those old wounds?'

'Because I'd like to heal them. Mr. Macdonald, when I told you we were not equals, I only told you the truth'—Macdonald winced—'I did not know then how infinitely you were my superior.'

'Miss Sedley!—Ethel!'

'Hear me out. I could not help admiring you. That was the reason I annoyed you so much—if I hadn't kept you in a state of chronic irritation you would have discovered my secret. Well, you saved my life at the risk of your own, and I showed my gratitude by moving away from Scotland.'

He looked at her intently. Despite her

assumed lightness of manner she was trembling, and her face was very pale.

‘It is now my turn to sue,’ she continued. ‘I have been very miserable. Forgive me. I once humiliated you, and it is now my turn. Mr. Macdonald, I love you, and I throw myself upon your mercy unconditionally.’

‘You—love—me?’

‘I have loved you from the beginning.’

He rose to his feet, and threw the cigar into the grate. Still something of his old dread was upon him, and he hesitated to catch her in his arms. He stood trembling.

‘No,’ he said, ‘it is impossible—or it is a dream. To-morrow you will mock me, and drive me from you.’

‘Never!—so long as you are willing to stay.’

‘ Oh, Ethel ! my love ! is it real ?’

‘ Substantial fact, Graham !’

‘ I may kiss you ?’

‘ Try.’

He sprang forward and caught her in his arms. Then came one of those moments which occur only once in a lifetime. She lay smiling on his breast, and he kissed her over and over again—her lips, her eyelids, her forehead, her scented hair. At last she looked up, radiant.

‘ Well, am I accepted ?’

‘ Oh, Ethel !’

‘ I was determined to propose, and I have proposed. Will you be mine—that is, may I be yours ? And,’ she added, as he beamed upon her, ‘ Oh, Graham ! So great, so strong, so true ! You’re like a big strong oak. I’m a poor little flower of a thing,



only fit to look up to you, as I do and will. Are you quite happy ?

‘ Yes ; but your friends—the world——’


‘ Friends ? I have only papa, and he’s prepared for anything. The world ? You shall be—you are—my world, the only one for which I care.’

‘ God bless you, my darling !’

‘ May He bless us both !’

They sat for hours side by side, going over the past, talking of the future. To both their minds it almost seemed as if a kindly Providence had brought them again together.

Late in the evening, when the little waiter came in to fasten up the windows and put everything away for the night, he was astonished to see monsieur and made-moiselle seated on the sofa side by side, but,



being a boy of vast experience, he simply smiled upon them in token of approval.

They stood talking on the hearth, Ethel holding her bedroom candlestick in her hand.

‘Next month,’ she murmurs; ‘it is very soon.’

‘Too soon?’

‘Not if you wish it. Yes, we will be married when Lawrance is married, at dear old Uribol; and your uncle shall marry us as well as them.’

‘Oh, Ethel!’

‘Oh, Graham!’

A little more whispering, then a rosebud of a mouth is put up, quite innocently and calmly, as if as a matter of course, for Graham to kiss.

' Good-night, my darling !'  
' Good-night, dear Graham !'  
And so, good-night all.

THE END.

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ARE COMMENCED IN THE

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OF

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BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE FIRST VIOLIN' AND 'PROBATION,'

AND

THE FRERES,

BY MRS. ALEXANDER,

Author of 'The Wooing O't,' etc.

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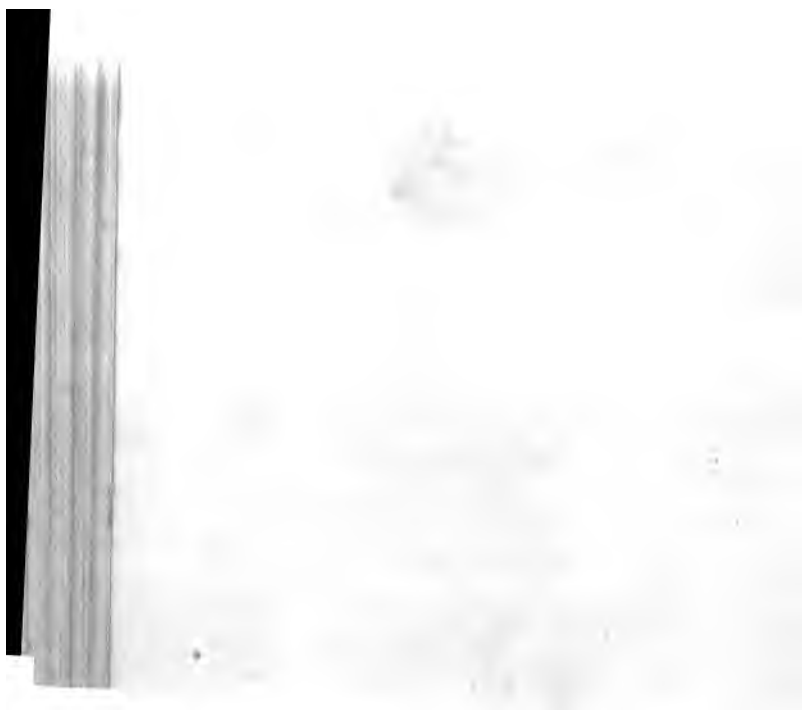
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