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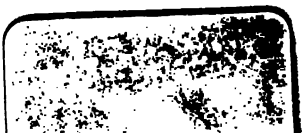
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A CHILD OF NATURE.

A Romance.

BY

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

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Second Edition.



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A CHILD OF NATURE.



CHAPTER I.

‘PETER NA CROICHE.’

LATER on in the day Lawrance came ashore. He was quite unconscious of the new interest his presence had awakened, and as he strolled up the village saw no more of the shooting party from Castle Cõreveolan.

From group to group he strolled, looking

'Shust. He's an awfu' man, the factor, but what can a pody do if a pody 'll no pay rent for the good land? It's no wise to offend the factor.'

As he spoke, the factor, with a face cold as marble, and nearly as white, especially round the edges of the lips, shook off the other's hold and walked away. The wretched being who had been abusing him, and who had obviously been taking liquor on an empty stomach, gazed vacantly after him with a look of wild despair, until a shepherd of his acquaintance staggered up with a bottle in his hand, clapped him on the shoulder, and offered him a draught of raw spirits. He drunk from the bottle wildly, uttered a hysteric laugh, and disappeared in the crowd.

Meanwhile Lawrance had followed Peter

Dougall, who was walking rapidly away, and touched him on the arm. The old man turned almost savagely, as if he expected to see his late antagonist; but recognising Lawrance, saluted him with great cordiality.

After a little talk they separated, arranging to meet again later in the day.

Dougall had just bidden Lawrance a respectful farewell, when a low voice cried almost in his ear—

'Peter—Peter na Croiche !'

Turning sharply, livid with rage, to ascertain who had used the odious nickname, he perceived nobody who appeared guilty; but a few yards off, among a group of people, stood Angus with the Dogs, gazing guilelessly at some distant object.

Dougall rushed up to the mendicant,

shaking his thick stick in the sly, yet vacant face.

‘Did you speak—you—you plackguard?’ he cried, in English.

Angus rolled his great eyes round, and answered with his lisp in the same tongue.

‘Pless me, Mr. Tougall, is that you? Are you keeping weel, sir?’

‘Caal me that name again, and I’ll have you whippit through the parish, you teevil’s limb!’

‘What name, Mr. Tougall?’ said Angus, innocently. ‘What name would a poor man call ye by but your ain name, Mr. Tougall?’

Speechless with indignation, the factor shook his stick again at the fool, and walked away, leaving the latter looking after him with a peculiar smile.

'You're Peter na Croiche for aal that,' reflected Angus. 'You hae been cut doon once, Peter na Croiche, but maybe you'll no be cut doon next time. It was a pad day for the Almighty God's poor when they *did* cut you doon ; it was spoiling a goot rope, Peter na Croiche, and sae I tell you.'

So Angus shuffled away, followed by his canine family. He turned a good penny that day by putting the tailless dog, called Shemus, through certain of his tricks—such as dancing on his hind legs, smoking a pipe, and playing at leap-frog with the collie. The shepherds and drovers were free with their pence, and, moreover, treated Angus to many a glass ; so that when night came he betook himself comfortably to the open hill, having, as he expressed it, 'better than a dozen blankets to keep him warm, and

carrying them in the best place in the world—his ain stomach.'

Towards evening the crowd greatly diminished, for the enormous fleet of herring boats sailed like a flock of birds to the open sea, there to rock all night at their nets at the mercy of tide and wind. It was a calm day, however—far too calm for the taste of the fishermen. It was a fine sight to see the red-sailed boats creeping slowly out of the calm loch, some moving with full sails on the dark patch where there was a little puff of wind, others with flapping sails being rowed slowly through a glassy calm—all crawling to the mouth of Loch Storport, where the breeze caught them, and they began to lie over and beat with some speed. Smacks of all sizes, double and single luggers, great skiffs, all sped to the deep sea fishing.

The little bay between the island and the pier was abandoned by all save two black coasting vessels and several rakish-looking 'runners,' waiting to carry the night's fishing south; and the water all round these was like oil, and a few white gulls seated thereon were drinking the floating globules of fat, while their companions, in one vast flock, had also departed to spend the night in fishing on the open sea.

Meantime the fun of the fair waxed fast and furious. Sellers and buyers had done their business, and all had now abandoned themselves to merriment—that is to say, to furious drinking. The lowing of the cattle and crying and singing of the men, the shrill voices of the women, made day hideous.

On a smooth bit of green above the inn

a ragged bagpiper and a blind fiddler were playing different tunes, and shepherds, herd-girls, farm-women, and drovers were dancing like mad people, with the usual shrieks that accompany the Highland reel.

Here a couple of men were fighting—not in the knock-down English fashion, but tearing, screaming, and clinging to each other's throats like wild-cats.

The dirty inn was crammed, and the sound of roaring and singing came from the rickety door. Half-naked Highlandmen in kilts were rushing about everywhere with bottles of whisky in their hands, beseeching their friends to drink.

Through the midst of the crowd, early in the day, passed a funeral procession—six Highlanders in mourning, two abreast, then the bearers and their load, then six more

men two abreast, all under the guidance of a man with a staff, under whose direction the bearers would hand the coffin over to the others, and themselves fall back into the rear until their turn came again to carry.

Behind the party came two ponies carrying wicker creels, with jars of whisky inside, and rolls of tobacco.

The whole had moved along to a military march played by a grey-headed piper, and disappeared to the burial-place up the country.

But towards night back rushed the mourners, free of their burden, laughing and singing, every one tipsy as Silenus, and these men became the wildest of the mirth-makers in the fair.

Night fell, and though the noise con-

tinued, the crowd grew thinner and thinner.

Every now and then the public-house door opened, and some refractory drunkard was shut out into the night, and the door barred in his face.

It was curious to note the different behaviour of the various parties so treated. One man stared around him vacantly, smiled feebly, and walked away unoffended ; another made the welkin ring with his howls, battered at the door with fists and feet, uttered threats of the most bloody vengeance against all and sundry ; another calmly lay where the enemy had deposited him, drowsily singing in chorus to the loud singing from within.

Again and again during the evening there was a splash and a scream, and the alarm

was given that some one had tumbled over the pier in the dark ; but there was no fatal accident, as the water was comparatively shallow, and help was at hand.

If any curious observer or midnight dreamer had been wandering that night among the hills and knolls surrounding Storport, he would have been startled every now and then by stumbling over a corpse-like recumbent figure, which would either grunt out a sleepy disapproval, or, springing to its feet, spar tipsily at the disturber of its slumber. Most of these figures would be armed with black bottles of whisky.

The highway, too, was sprinkled with drowsy Bacchanalians. More than one well-to-do farmer was already lying tranquilly asleep on the road, still gripping the bridle of the horse from which he had gently

rolled; while the quiet beast, used to its master's eccentricity, was patiently nibbling the scanty herbage on the side of the road. And a little way off his head shepherd, perhaps quite as respectable-looking, and quite as respectably clothed as his master, was sleeping too, with his tired dog curled up close to his head.

With very few exceptions, there were no female night-birds of the tipsy kind, though out on the lonely hill-side more than one girl was lying coiled up in her lover's plaid, far too sick and weary to take the dark road home.

Before daybreak, however, all the thirsty plants were cooled by a drenching shower; and when the sun rose, or rather, when he looked out of the clouds with a ghastly countenance—just like one who had been

keeping it up overnight, and was suffering for it in the morning—when light came, and the herring-boats were again at anchor, and the pier and the shores were glittering with fresh fish, almost all the Bacchanalians had disappeared from the hills and knolls, and the inn had subsided into its chronic state of dirt, darkness, languor, and general misery.





CHAPTER II.

LORD ARRANMORE AT LAST.

SEVERAL hours before the fair had terminated, Mina, with her uncle and Graham, embarked on Koll Nicholson's smack, and sailed back to Uribol.

Lawrance had asked them to return with him in the *Jenny*, but, partly because Graham seemed very unwilling, the offer had been refused.

After the business which had brought the

Macdonalds to the fair was over, they had no desire to linger in Storport. The clergyman had no wish to remain, and bear witness to the scenes of debauchery which he knew from experience would wind up the proceedings of the day, and now that their interview with Lawrance was over, Mina did not seem to care how soon she returned to the manse.

And yet no sooner was she on the smack, which was gliding along swiftly towards Uribol, than she looked back with a sad, disappointed gaze at the shore which she was leaving behind. For several weeks now life had been changing for Mina, but she had never felt the change so forcibly as she did that night. However much she might try, she could not show an interest in the neat sailing of the smack, or in Koll Nicholson's

stories; in the general conversation connected with the fair—things which on ordinary occasions would have commanded her attention.

But as she sat in the boat that night looking at the slowly receding shores of Storport, she was picturing to herself a face which she had seen there, listening to a voice which she had heard.

It seemed strange to Mina that, after the words which had been spoken on the day the carriage was passing from Coreveolan Castle to the manse at Uribol, Lawrance should never again have spoken to her in the same strain.

Since Graham's return his visits to the manse had not been so frequent as they had been before, though, when he did come, his manner to her was just the same as it had

ever been—frank and friendly, with just enough *empressement* in his tone to remind her of his special interest in her alone.

Altogether it was an enigma to Mina, and the more she thought over it, the more perplexed she became. Could it be possible, she thought, that those words, that pressure, that look had meant nothing—nothing, that is, more than the ordinary interest of a friend? If this was so, she thought with a pang, it would be better, far better for her, if he had never come, since with his words and looks of love he had drawn forth love in return.

Yes, she could no longer conceal from herself the fact that this man, coming like a gleam of sunshine in winter weather, had gradually become dearer to her than any member of her home.

He had irradiated by his very presence the days which crept drearily along at the manse—he had infused a new pleasure into her work—but, alas! how quickly the pleasure went if once he kept away.

Mina remembered how happily the evenings used to pass when Lawrance occupied the arm-chair—she had gone through her lessons with proud consciousness that she was surprising and pleasing him. She had read Gaelic with a voice more musical than ever because he was there to hear, and then, after the tasks were done, she had sat listening to his conversation with her uncle, waiting for that pressure of the hand, that lingering look, half of love, half of admiration, which never failed to come.

But now how changed it all was! The glamour had gone, for looks of approval

seldom came to her now, except from her uncle or Graham.

Mina was very fond of her brother, and in her heart really glad to see him back again ; but she felt that his hostile manner had driven Lawrance away, and it made her very sad.

As she sailed home that night she felt really angry with him, and somewhat vexed with her uncle, too. She remembered how, on the previous evening, when Lawrance had walked over to the manse to ask the Macdonalds with his own lips if they would sail with him to Storport on the morrow, Graham, after gloomily refusing for himself, had signalled to his uncle to refuse also ; and the minister had done as he was bid. Mina said nothing—so outrageous an act as to question the conduct of her uncle and

brother never occurred to her—but she went up to bed that night with a sore heart. Her disappointment at not being able to sail in the *Jenny* was rendered so much the more acute by the recollection of the look which had passed over Lawrance's face as the refusal had been given.

But when he had turned to her the look had passed away. He had held forth his hand—

‘Good-night, Miss Macdonald,’ he said. ‘I hope, at any rate, it may be my fortune to meet you in the fair.’

Then, with a polite but somewhat formal ‘Good-night’ to the minister, and a curt nod to Graham, he had taken his departure.

After he had gone nothing was said about him, but Mina felt it was finally fixed that

she must not sail in the *Jenny*. She had quietly submitted to the plan of going over in Koll Nicholson's smack, and her journey was made brighter by the expectation which she had of meeting Lawrance at Storport.

And she had met him ; she had had the satisfaction of seeing the familiar, fond, admiring look pass over his face as his eyes had rested upon her, of feeling again the warm pressure of the hand.

It was of this Mina was thinking as she sat silently watching the water which washed quietly at the boat's side ; it was of this she was thinking when, on reaching home, she retired, not to rest, but to watch patiently for the light which would come like a messenger to tell her *he* was near.

It was a bright, clear, starlight night,

silent save for the low murmur of the sea. Mina threw open the window and looked at the jet black line of mountains, at the dreary expanse of sea. Her uncle and Graham were already asleep, but until she knew that Lawrance was safe in Uribol she felt she could not rest. One, two, three hours dragged slowly past, and at length her patience was rewarded. By the light of dawn, which already reddened the east, she saw the *Jenny*, with all her white sails unfurled, glide slowly up the fjord. For a time she allowed her wearied gaze to rest lovingly on the little vessel; then, with a sob of joy, she kissed her hands. 'Good night, good night,' she whispered, before she closed her window to lie down to rest.

On awakening in the morning, Mina's first thought was, 'Will he come to-day?'

She had quite made up her mind that he would come, for she thought, after that look which he had given her in the fair, he could not stay away; he had thrown his whole soul into his eyes, and his soul had said, 'I love you.'

It was very dull at the manse that day. Immediately after breakfast Mr. Macdonald shut himself into his study to work hard at a paper which, signed by all the tenants, was asking for the summary dismissal of the factor, whose tyranny had become too hard to bear, and which the clergyman intended to hand personally to Lord Arranmore, immediately that nobleman made his appearance upon his estate. Graham, still feeling the fatigue of the day before, remained mostly in his room. But Mina could not rest in peace. Now she was

wandering aimlessly from room to room, startling her uncle from his labours, her brother from his reading, Kirsty, the old housekeeper, from her knitting in the chimney-nook ; again she was looking from her bedroom window at the sea, or, standing upon the threshold, she would gaze towards the spot where Lawrance dwelt. But hour after hour passed by and he did not come, and late that night Mina went to bed with a heart more saddened than it had ever been before.

While Mina had been looking up towards the Lodge that day, Lawrance had been gazing down towards the manse. While he looked, he wondered whether or not it would be wise for him to see Mina. He, like Graham, felt listless after the fatigue of the fair, ready for an indolent stroll and

chat; both of which, had Graham Macdonald not returned to Uribol, would have been well within his reach. Besides, he could not now forego Mina's society without a pang—a pang, however, which he seemed more willing to bear than her brother's sullen stare.

‘He is so insolent, too,’ he said to himself; ‘so cubbish, rude, and disdainful, that I sometimes have a difficulty in holding my peace, or keeping my hands from administering a thrashing, and yet I think I could manage to bear even more than this from Mina's brother.’

This was followed by a series of retrospections, in each of which Mina was the central figure. Finally, cursing the evil luck which had, at so critical a time, sent Graham back to Uribol, he resolved to bear

with his loneliness and not walk down to the manse that day. But when he arose the next morning, he fully determined that neither Graham, nor any other human being, should keep him another day from Mina. Through all his dreams that night her face had shone, loving, trustful, with eyes full of tender, spiritual light, gazing up into his. She had wound her arms about his neck and smiled, while he, clasping her to his bosom, had pressed, for the first time, his passionate lips to hers; but even as he did so, she shivered as if with bitter cold, and faded from his sight.

The mingled joy and sorrow of his dream was strong upon him when, in the full, clear light of day, he opened his wearied eyes. He resolved that, come what might, he would that day see Mina. He would have pre-

ferred, all things considered, to have seen her alone, but, as that could not be done, he resolved to walk over to the manse and run the risk of being coolly received by her irritating brother.

He breakfasted late, and lingered long over the meal. It was more than probable Graham might be going out, and, if so, he would have plenty of time to get clear away before the obnoxious stranger showed himself. It was close on midday when at length Lawrance left the lodge and took the road towards the manse.

He walked on quickly, and had gone more than two-thirds of the way, when suddenly he paused, thanking the good star which he felt at length prevailed. There, straight before him, though a good distance away, was Mina herself, walking away from

the manse, and taking the road which led to the seashore. Lawrance left the footpath, cut across the hill, and in less than five minutes' time he had reached her side. Mina raised her eyes, but said nothing. Lawrance lifted his hat and held forth his hand.

'How are you?' he said, giving her hand such a tender pressure as made her blush from brow to chin. 'I was on my way to the manse, when, catching sight of you, I left my path and cut directly across the hill. Where are you going?'

'Nowhere in particular. If you like, I will walk with you back to the manse.'

She turned as if to retrace her steps, but Lawrance laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

‘No, don’t go,’ he said. ‘I want you to stay a little while with me.’

Mina paused, not very well knowing what to do, and then the two walked on for a few minutes in silence. Lawrance was the first to speak again.

‘I was sorry you were not on board the *Jenny* on Tuesday. She made a capital run.’

‘Yes, and I was sorry.’

‘Were you?’ he said, looking earnestly into her face, and trying in vain to make her raise her eyes. ‘Tell me honestly, were you sorry, Mina?’

She did not raise her eyes, she did not remind him that he had—inadvertently, perhaps—called her again by her Christian name, but she answered quietly—

‘Yes.’

At that moment Mina was angry with herself.

When she opened her lips she could only utter monosyllables; she felt that her cheeks would blush, and, worst of all, when he took her hand and put it on his arm it trembled in his grasp.

‘You have not been like your old self lately, Mina,’ he continued. ‘You have shown a fatal readiness to refuse almost every request of mine. I wonder if you will refuse the one I am going to make to-day?’

‘Maybe; until you have made it I cannot tell.’

‘It is a very simple request, very easily complied with, and it rests solely with you.’

‘Well, sir?’

‘I want you to give me a lock of your hair.’

Mina raised her eyes this time, and her cheeks went pale as death.

‘A lock of my hair?’ she said.

‘Yes, Mina, a lock of your hair. Is the request so terrible that you should turn so pale? I want you to clip it from here—one of these locks that I have seen so often caressing your brow. Oh, you hesitate—you will not give me what I ask?’

She answered his question with another.

‘Are you going away?’

‘Going away? Not that I know of.’

‘Then why should you want my hair?’ she asked, turning aside her head that he might not see the flush which now suffused her cheeks. ‘In Scotland one only gives such gifts when——’

‘Yes, Mina, go on.’

‘Well, when folk care very much for one another. If I were to give my hair to you everybody in the clachan would gossip about it, and my uncle and Graham would blame me for doing what was wrong.’

‘Do you think, then, if possessed of such a treasure, I should bring it forth for every soul to look on? Your uncle would never hear of it, for none save myself would know.’

‘Do not ask me to do what is foolish, Mr. Lawrance. Even if no one were to hear of it, I should never feel contented again.’

‘Mina!’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Have you no faith in me? Do you not know that I would sooner lose all I have in the world than ask you to do a wrong?’

Have you not seen, do you not know, how much I care for you ?

‘ You care for me ? ’ she murmured, dwelling upon each word, with lingering tones of pleasure. He took her hands in his—he drew her to him, and raised towards him her blushing face.

‘ Yes, Mina, ’ he said. ‘ I care for you with all my heart and soul. ’ Then putting his arm round her he added, ‘ Tell me now, my dear, if you care anything for me. ’

She yielded to his passionate pressure, but she did not answer him.

‘ Mina, speak to me—just a few words, my darling. Only this, “ Lawrance, I love you ! ” ’

What need was there for words ? Was there not love and trust written on every feature of her face ? Her clinging figure

and trembling hands made assurance doubly sure. Nevertheless, since he desired it, she felt that she must speak. She opened her lips, she raised her face.

Suddenly her cheek grew pale, her gaze became fixed, and she did not utter a word.

The cause of Mina's sudden agitation was an elegantly dressed lady, who stood upon the hillside only a little distance away. Just behind her was an elderly gentleman.

From the position in which they stood, it seemed as if they had come over the brow of the hill which rose directly behind them, and passing silently over the heather-clad shoulder had approached to within a few yards of the spot where the lovers stood, and had possibly overheard some of the conversation.

Astonished at the sudden change in Mina's manner, and noting the fixed look of her eyes, Lawrance turned too, and saw for the first time the cause of Mina's agitation. As he did so, his cheek grew even paler than her own. He dropped her hands, and, as if involuntarily, drew a few steps away.

'Ethel!' he exclaimed.

A look of pretty disdain on the lady's face deepened, she curled her lip, and gave a peculiar laugh, as she came a few steps forward.

'Yes, Ethel,' she said. 'Glad to see me, Lawrance? You would be, I am sure, if you only knew the trouble we had taken to find you out. But it is perhaps unfortunate that we arrived here at so critical a moment,' she continued, addressing the old gentle-

man, who was vainly endeavouring to speak. 'Come, papa, you see we are not wanted here. When Lawrance has quite finished his innocent rural studies, perhaps he will condescend to rejoin us on the other side of the hill !'

At this the gentleman put up an eyeglass, and surveyed Mina from head to foot.

Up to this time Mina had not uttered a word ; she had stood pale as a ghost, looking first at Lawrance, then at the people who had addressed him. When the lady spoke she felt a sickening sense of fear gradually stealing about her heart ; but when she found that she was being surveyed through the eyeglass with such insulting coolness, her face went crimson with indignation.

‘ Mr. Lawrance—sir,’ she said quickly, ‘ who are these folk ?’

‘ They are friends of mine,’ he said awkwardly, and at that moment he cursed himself to think that he could find no word to say more.

‘ Friends!’ returned Mina, with quiet dignity. ‘ You said, sir, that you had no friends here.’

‘ Oh, indeed !’ returned Miss Sedley, with a mocking laugh. ‘ So he has been passing as the friendless orphan, has he? How sentimental, to be sure! But, you see, he has not told you exactly the truth—he *has* friends; though, to give him his due, he did not know that they were so near him.’

‘ Or he wouldn’t have been caught flirting with a milkmaid—eh, Ethel?’ said the old gentleman.

‘Uncle!’ cried the young man, ‘for God’s sake hold your peace. This young lady——’

‘Oh, don’t get on the stilts, Lawrance, for the game’s up, my boy. I daresay this young lady doesn’t even know who you are, or she wouldn’t have made such a fool of herself. Well, my dear, in case his lordship has been deceiving you, I may as well tell you.’

‘Uncle, hold your tongue!’ thundered Lawrance, now fairly aroused to wrath. ‘If she has to be told, I will tell her!’

‘No, you won’t, Lawrance,’ continued Ethel, stepping forward. ‘Since I have got to make a wry face and swallow the bitter, I mean to have some of the sweet to take it down. Madam,’ she continued, making a mocking curtsy to Mina, ‘permit

me to introduce myself as Miss Sedley. This is my father, Sir Charles Sedley ; and that gentleman whom you were so fondly caressing as we came over the hill is my affianced husband, Lord Arranmore !

The words, uttered so disdainfully, fell ominously upon Mina's ears, but, amid all her sorrow and shame, she felt her dignity assert itself. She could not keep her cheeks from growing pale, but she forced back the tears from her eyes, and, when Lawrance approached her with outstretched hand, she proudly moved away.

At this moment she heard a familiar voice behind her, and, turning, she saw that her uncle and Graham were approaching side by side. She walked up to her uncle, and slipped her hand in his.

‘Mina,’ he said, ‘is anything the matter, my bairn?’

‘No, uncle, nothing much; only I have just heard that Mr. Lawrance is Lord Arranmore!’





CHAPTER III.

THE MASK FALLS.

THE revelation of Lawrance's true identity came like a thunderclap. Mr. Macdonald stood astonished and confused, while Graham, with a face made pale by passion, gazed angrily at the new-comers.

The young lord himself was the first to speak.

'The mask is torn away,' he said, with a nervous attempt at a smile, 'just as I was

about to take it off. Mr. Macdonald, will you pardon my innocent deception? I came here *incognito*, wishing to ascertain for myself the condition of these estates, and to discover if the people had any just ground of complaint. You will excuse my having passed under a pseudonym, now that you know the harmlessness of my intention.'

Mr. Macdonald was silent, but Graham now spoke vehemently.

'One deception leads to many!' he exclaimed. 'You had no right to enter our house under a false name!'

'Graham!' cried Mina, alarmed at the words and the tone.

Lord Arranmore looked quietly into Graham's face, and made no direct reply to his words, but his lips curled with an ex-

pression of cold contempt. Graham, not shrinking at the look, but resenting it with a determined scowl, clenched his hands as if for a blow, and looked interrogatingly at his uncle.

The old clergyman, with the courtesy and dignity habitual to him, conquered his first feeling of indignation, and bowed gravely to Arranmore.

‘ You will admit, my lord,’ he said, ‘ that we have some reason to feel surprised, and perhaps a little annoyed. However, you had doubtless excellent motives for what you did, and at any rate it is not for me to judge your conduct. I welcomed you to my hearth as a friend and equal, and I am sorry——’

‘ We are friends still, I hope,’ interposed the young lord, warmly, ‘ and equals always.’

Believe me, nothing could exceed the respect I feel for you and yours !'

During this little scene Sir Charles Sedley and his daughter had stood by in no little astonishment. As for Miss Sedley, whose sense of humour was fine, she was not a little amused that so much trouble should be taken to conciliate people so common, so far removed from the brilliant social sphere in which she herself moved. She at last advanced deliberately, and said :

'I think we had better go. It is a pity we came to interfere with your amusement. It must have been delightful to live here, unnoticed and unknown, just like a shepherd in a play. I quite envy you, Lawrance—upon my word I do—and so, I'm sure, does papa !'

In answer to a questioning look from Mr.

Macdonald, Arranmore thought it necessary to go through some sort of an introduction.

‘This is my cousin, Miss Ethel Sedley. Ethel, let me introduce the Rev. Mr. Macdonald; and,’ he added, turning to Graham, ‘this other gentleman——’

‘Is a friend of mine already,’ said Ethel, airily, ‘though he won’t notice me this time. We met before in Edinburgh, when I was staying with Lady Murray.’

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed Arranmore, while Graham made a moody sign of recognition.

Without uttering a word, Sir Charles Sedley thereupon favoured Graham with that stony stare which is the special prerogative of the British aristocrat, and scowled suspiciously at his daughter.

An awkward silence now ensued, which

was at last broken by the old clergyman.

‘Won’t you step back to the manse,’ he said courteously, ‘and permit me to offer you some refreshment? You must have had a long walk across the hills.’

For a moment no one answered him. Lawrance looked at Mina, but she, keeping close to her uncle, studiously fixed her eyes upon the ground. Ethel looked at Graham, and he would not return her gaze. Hardly noting the general consternation, Sir Charles Sedley spoke :

‘Allow me,’ he said, ‘for myself, as well as for these young people, to thank you for your offer, sir. We cannot accept it to-day, I am afraid, as it is already late, and we have a long way to walk home ; but some day before we leave Uribol I shall hope

to have the pleasure of calling upon you.'

At this little speech Mina heaved a sigh of relief, and, turning without a word of adieu, walked with her brother a few steps away. The old clergyman, noting her downcast look and peculiar manner, attributed it to overwhelming nervousness at being in the presence of people so distinguished; he therefore, as if to make up for her nervousness, infused unusual respect and dignity into his own manner.

'Madam,' he said, removing his hat with a grand sweep of his arm as he fixed his grave eyes on Ethel, 'I have the honour to wish you good-day. If during your stay in this district I can be of the slightest use to you, I am entirely at your service.'

Ethel bowed and smiled, but her eyes

were fixed, not upon the clergyman, but upon the slowly retreating figure of his nephew.

Mr. Macdonald turned to Lawrance.

‘My lord,’ he said, ‘if during the past few weeks I have used words which were not intended for the ears of the Lord of Arranmore, I must plead as my excuse the very peculiar and trying position in which you placed me. When I welcomed you to the manse I fully believed that I was welcoming a poor student.’

‘It was, in fact, the man, and not the lord, whom you welcomed, Mr. Macdonald,’ said Arranmore, heartily grasping the old clergyman’s hand. ‘Believe me, it will be one of the greatest pleasures of my life to remember that.’

Macdonald bowed gravely, and, after

raising his hat to Sir Charles Sedley, politely retired to join Mina and Graham, who were already walking slowly towards the manse.

His first care was to admonish both of the young people for not having been more polite to the young laird and his friends, his next to launch forth into praises of the young gentleman whose unaccountable escapade had led to so much confusion. He could not but admit that, in assuming an *alias* at all, his lordship had committed an act which was deserving of very strong censure indeed; that, still under cover of the *alias*, he had entered the clergyman's household on terms of equality, and thereby gained the special confidence of the family. He had exposed himself to still greater condemnation; for the old man remembered with some trepidation that often, at those

evening conferences which were held in the study at the manse, the young lord had sat and listened to some good round abuse of himself! Still, amid all this mortification, it was a consolation to him to know that the young lord was a student both of books and men, that he loved his home and the home of his ancestors, which was set amidst the solitudes of the north, and that for very love of his home and his people he had been content to wear for a time the garb of common humanity. . Since he had been content to endure privations in order that he might ~~make~~ speak out justice, surely, thought the old clergyman, he would not be so ungenerous as to harbour in his mind any revengeful thought against one who had thought it incumbent upon him to speak out strongly on the people's behalf. Then he spoke out

in commendation of Lord Arranmore and of his lordship's friends.

Presently he noticed, to his surprise, that he was getting no answer. He looked at Graham; he was walking along in moody silence. He looked at Mina; her eyes were fixed upon the ground too, and her face was still deathly pale.

'Mina, my bairn.'

'Yes, uncle?'

She answered him quietly enough, but she did not raise her face, neither did she remove her steadfast gaze from the ground.

'Did you happen to learn, my bairn, when these strangers arrived in Uribol?'

'No, indeed.'

'Nor where they are staying?'

'No.'

Graham remembered having seen them on the hills the very day that he arrived in Uribol, but as his uncle had evidently forgotten all about the episode he did not think it worth while to remind him. So Graham was allowed to pursue his way in silence, while the cross-examination of Mina went on.

‘Who first told you that Mr. Lawrance was the young lord, Mina?’

‘The lady,’ replied Mina, suddenly growing crimson at the recollection of that scene.

‘Ah, she has a fine face, a very fine face, and her bearing is such as to stamp her at once as a member of our aristocracy. I was sorry, my dear, that during that scene you did not exhibit a little of her self-command; it is such a sign of good breeding to be able

to conduct yourself with perfect dignity under any circumstances whatever.'

To this speech Mina did not reply, for at that moment they all three paused before the door of the manse. Mr. Macdonald and Graham walked straight into the study, and Mina passed at once up to her own room.

Having gained it she sat down on the side of her bed, and gazed around her with eyes full of despairing pain. It seemed to her as if she had passed out of the sunlight into the clammy moisture of a tomb. She could not think—the cold which crept over her shrinking frame dulled her senses and turned her very heart sick. For a time she sat gazing listlessly about her. Suddenly a vision of that scene on the hill-side came before her mental sight, and with a shudder

she covered her burning face with her hands as if for very shame.

Up to that day Mina Macdonald had had few sorrows, even if she had few pleasures. Her days had been spent in quiet contentment at home amid the quaint recesses of learning; abroad upon the wild waters of the sea she had been happy to think that she was seeing beautiful things and gaining strength. If at times she was inclined to wish for a gleam of that intenser joy which is generally allotted to womankind, the wish was only transitory—for she thought, ‘I have my uncle and my brother, I ought to be content—only, if it pleases God that I shall one day win to myself such love as other women win, my happiness will be shared with them.’

So she had lived on in quiet contentment

until Lawrance came. But Mina's nature was by no means of that weak headlong sort which would induce her to give her love unreservedly to the first comer with pleasant manners and a handsome face. Had she from the first known Lawrance to be what he was—of a rank far above her—she would never for a moment have allowed him to draw from her one sign of love. It was because she believed him to be an equal, because he assured her by his words, still more by his looks, that she had won his love, that she gave her fond confidence in return. Well, she had had one or two weeks of happiness, for even amidst her doubts and fears she had been made happy by the consciousness of his presence. But now what a terrible retribution had come with one blow swift and sure! Her idol

became, not shattered at her feet, but lifted far above her head. He was no longer one who had come like a blessing from God to make her life complete, but a superior being whose presence from the first had brought her nothing but degradation, insult, and shame.

It was some comfort to Mina, amidst all her sorrow, to think that her uncle, simple as a child in matters of the world, remained in complete ignorance of the true issues of what had passed. Her shame was keen enough. She did not merit one look of reproach from the minister's grave eyes; she only prayed that the young maiden who was destined to become the Lady of Arranmore would not trouble herself to describe to the minister the scene which she had witnessed on the hill-side. How well Mina

remembered the pang which had shot through her breast when the girl had described Lawrance as her affianced husband. She had stood with a cold hand pressing upon her quickly beating heart, her eyes eagerly fixed upon her lover's face, her ears awaiting the words which should give the statement the lie. But he had not uttered them ; he had turned his head away, as if to avoid the look of shame which he knew would cross her face.

What agony it had cost her then not to throw her arms around her uncle's neck and ease her aching heart in tears ; but her pride had come to her aid and upheld her, just as it must uphold her still. Yes, at that moment Mina felt her whole nature rising in revolt at the trick that had been played upon her. She could not undo what she

had done ; she could not recall the looks and words which his endearments had drawn forth ; but she resolved not to play the part of the broken-hearted damsel at whom the finger of scandal could point, as at one who had brought ridicule upon her uncle's house and shame upon herself—one who for a few short weeks had been the plaything of a lord. The trial was hard to bear, but she resolved to bear it bravely, and to keep her sorrow hidden, even if it broke her heart.

It was a brave resolve, but poor Mina lacked the physical strength to keep it. Each morning when she looked in the glass she found her face paler, her cheeks more pinched and thin. Each night she thought, why does he not send, or come to explain this mystery away ?



CHAPTER IV.

ARRANMORE'S HOME-COMING.

WHEN Mr. Macdonald had walked away to join his nephew and niece, the three people thus left together on the hill did not know very well what to do. Lawrance's first impulse was to rush after Mina, to take his place by her side and boldly assert his right to remain there ; but, convinced by a moment's reflection of the folly of such an act, he very wisely refrained, so he stood like a statue

upon the hill-side, watching, with a sickening feeling of remorse and shame, the retreating figure of the girl, and forgetting for a moment the very existence of his relatives who stood near.

But they did not forget him. Sir Charles Sedley, after bestowing a contemptuous stare upon the whole of the retreating party, fixed his eyes keenly and somewhat angrily upon his nephew, while his daughter withdrew her gaze occasionally from the figure of the young Highlander to fix it with chill sarcasm upon the man who had promised to become her husband.

Presently the retreating party passed over the brow of the hill and disappeared. Then Miss Sedley turned to her father.

‘Is it necessary for us to linger here longer,

papa?' she said, turning her back upon Lawrance.

'Certainly not, my love,' returned the baronet. 'I am quite ready to start if Lawrance is.'

'Lawrance!' she said, with a little contemptuous shrug. 'If we wait for him we shall not get home till midnight. He is evidently bent on seeing the sun set amongst those hills. It seems to me we are quite well able to return as we came—without him.'

Here Lawrance shook off his apathy and came forward.

'Where are you staying?' he asked quietly.

'At Coreveolan, of course,' returned the baronet, testily. 'We drove over in the dogcart; but as your lodgings are near at

hand we'll go there first, and get something to eat and drink.'

Lawrance quietly acquiesced, and turning, offered his arm to Ethel; but she curtly refused it, and moving from his side, walked with her father across the hill.

During that walk to the lodge Mina's name was never once mentioned. Every attempt at conversation was strained, until at length all parties seemed to agree that silence was best. So they walked on, Ethel leaning affectionately on her father's arm, and sometimes making a remark to him; and Lawrance stalking moodily on the baronet's other side.

At length the lodge was reached, and Ethel, releasing her father's arm, walked into the parlour, threw off her hat and

/

jacket, and proceeded to make herself comfortable.

‘Really,’ she said, looking around the room, ‘Lawrance knows how to take care of himself. This is not at all a bad little place for the Highlands.’

‘Do you think so? Well, it has been a perfect godsend to me, I can assure you.’

Ethel frowned and turned her shoulder. She thought her father had followed her into the room. Now she found that he had remained outside, in all probability to give her a chance of making it up with her lover. But she did not intend to make it up so readily; at any rate, not till he was ready to come as a humbled suppliant for her mercy. So she turned her back upon him, and looked out of the window; and Law-

rance, noting the action and the frown upon her brow, said no more.

When they sat down to the lunch which the old housekeeper had hastily prepared, Sir Charles saw at once that things remained much the same as they had been before ; at any rate, no reconciliation had taken place. Ethel sat frowning petulantly, and Lawrance was gloomily silent as ever. The baronet was angry too, but he did not think it politic to show his anger at the time ; indeed, he turned quite pleasantly to his nephew as he asked :

‘ How long have you been rustivating in this remote district, Lawrance ?’

‘ Two or three weeks.’

‘ And you came *incog.* from mere caprice, I suppose ?’

‘ Not at all. I had a motive in it, and

wanted to see for myself the real condition of the people.'

The baronet made no reply to this. Another uncomfortable silence ensued, which was broken by Lawrance.

'When did *you* arrive here?'

He looked at Ethel, but, as she did not choose to notice the look, her father replied for her :

'We left London about a week ago, fully three weeks before the time that we arranged to meet you at Coreveolan. Ethel was getting knocked up in town, and I thought the change would do her good, so off we started. We found the castle habitable, but the place miserably dull. Little Baron Bromsen, who came with us, got a surfeit of it in less than three days, and started for the Rhine. Since then Ethel

and I have had the castle to ourselves, and precious dull it's been !'

He ceased, and again there was an uncomfortable silence ; then the baronet spoke again :

' Well, now we have run you to earth, we must try between us to make it a bit livelier for Ethel.'

' I suppose she finds it dull.'

' Well, I must confess I do, rather,' said Ethel, with a forced laugh. ' You see, we women cannot find so many amusements as you men can ; and, besides, I have not got your passion for nature in the rough.'

At this covert taunt Lawrance flushed to the temples ; the baronet frowned as he met his daughter's eye, and Ethel held her peace. But she was wearying to get away, so she bothered her father until he ordered

out the trap which had brought them there. Ethel stepped in, unfurled her parasol, and prepared to give a stately bow to Lawrance ; but, to her amazement, he stepped in too, and took his seat right behind her.

‘What, are you coming over to the castle ?’ she said.

‘Yes, of course.’

She did not know that her father had asked, nay, almost entreated, him to come, so she took it as a sign of penitence. She was glad, very glad, that he was going to make it up, for, after all, the quarrel was a very stupid one. He had simply been ignominiously caught giving a kiss to a pretty girl, and the girl had been thoroughly overwhelmed when she was told the rank of the wooer ; and Ethel had chosen to sulk and

show jealousy simply because she wanted him to kiss and pet her, and charm her frowns away. Unfortunately, Lawrance had sulked too, and things were threatening to become serious if this stupid child's play was not soon brought to an end.

Altogether Ethel was glad when Lord Arranmore stepped into the carriage, for it seemed to her that reconciliation was at hand. But, to her amazement, he sat in the same moody, discontented way as he had sat in the lodge. Indeed, during the whole of that long drive he scarcely opened his lips. He was thinking of the time when he had traversed that road before—of the two little hands which on that occasion he had taken into his—of the grave, truthful, steadfast eyes which had been raised to return his look when he had asked, in a

voice full of passionate love, 'Mina, will you not trust me?' She had trusted him, and he had belied the trust.

Through the long delay in Uribol the Sedleys arrived at the castle only a quarter of an hour before dinner was to be served; consequently Lawrance, after seeing his cousin safely in, passed at once up to a bedroom.

In a very short time he re-emerged, and made his way downstairs.

It seemed to him as if the whole place had been transformed since that memorable day when last he came, for Sir Charles had brought a large number of servants in his train, and they swarmed about the building. Lawrance found a strange footman in plain dress ready to meet him at every turn, to glance with a sigh at the shooting suit

which he had not changed, to open the door with the profoundest of bows.

Ethel was in the drawing-room when he entered it. Though the time for dressing had been short enough, she had found it ample to exchange her travelling-dress for a dinner-dress of black and amber ; to fasten in her hair a diamond spray, around her throat a diamond necklet, and to arrange her black hair with her usual negligent grace. She sat near the very piano which he had offered to send over to the manse for Mina ; her cheek was shaded from the fire by one of the screens which he had begged Mina to take. The room was brilliantly lit, and made to look tolerably comfortable. The baronet, entering at this moment, cunningly made the young lord feel that, for the first time in his life, he

was to play the part of host to his uncle and cousin. Lawrance, therefore, anxious at once to sustain his part well, threw off at once his gloomy preoccupation of manner and made himself agreeable to his guests. More than a year had passed since he had last seen them, so when once the constraint between them had worn away he found he had much to tell. He chatted away pleasantly during the evening, but never once did he mention the family at Uribol Manse.

‘It’s all right, Ethel,’ said the baronet that night after the young lord had retired. ‘I dare say the young scamp felt ashamed at having played the peasant, and was a bit vexed at you for letting out the truth. But don’t take any more notice of it, my dear.’

‘Very well, papa.’

‘And try to make yourself a bit agreeable to Lawrance?’

‘I am quite willing, if he chooses to make himself agreeable to me.’

‘Bless my soul, Ethel, he has been as agreeable as he could possibly be all the evening; but he won’t keep it up if you mean to go on sulking.’

‘Then he can do the other thing, papa.’

Her father looked at her keenly, as he replied:

‘You mean he can cause it to be said that he grew to prefer the society of a Scotch peasant girl to that of his cousin, the acknowledged belle of two London seasons?’

Miss Sedley flushed angrily.

‘The girl is not a peasant; she is sister

to Graham Macdonald, whom I met at Lady Murray's last year.'

'And who, pray, is Graham Macdonald?'

'I don't know.'

'Of course you don't, and neither does anybody else. And who is Lady Murray? Only a dowdy old Highland lady, who would be no one out of Edinburgh. Look here, Ethel; don't you run your head against those Macdonalds; you'll find Lawrance quite enough for you.'

They sat talking for fully half an hour longer. In the end Ethel kissed her father, and promised to be dutiful and obey him.

But Sir Charles soon found that his daughter was not his greatest care. After the first evening at the castle, Lawrance took to moping again, and the baronet

presently discovered that the cause of his moody preoccupation was the clergyman's niece.

'The affair is more serious than I thought,' he reflected; 'and, if things are let alone, I am afraid Ethel will stand a poor chance of being Lady Arranmore. But I think I see a means of setting things right, and I'll do it, let it cost what it may.'





CHAPTER V.

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

THE next morning as Mina sat on the shore of the fjord, a hundred yards away from the manse door, she was greeted in the well-known voice of Angus-of-the-Dogs, and, turning, she saw the mendicant himself standing close by her. His face wore its characteristic vacant smile, his large eyes rolled, and he shuffled uneasily with his feet, round which several of his canine followers were running silently.

‘Good-morning, Angus,’ she said with a smile, speaking in Gaelic.

‘Good-morning, and the blessing of God on the girl with the golden hair!’ he answered in the same tongue. ‘I’ve been looking for you high and low.’

‘For me, Angus?’

‘For yourself, miss. Hush, and whisper! Don’t pretend to be looking at me while I give ye something sweeter than honey, and better than a poor man’s plaster for a sick heart. A line, darling, from the one you know.’

So saying, with many nods, winks, chuckles, and glances round, and a general air of sympathetic secrecy, he drew from his pouch an envelope and placed it in her hand.

It was quite blank, without any super-

scription whatever, and she looked at it in some perplexity.

‘Open it quick, now,’ exclaimed Angus ; ‘there’s a word of comfort inside.’

Thus urged, she opened the envelope, and read, on a small piece of note-paper enclosed within, these words in a man’s hand :

‘I must see you. Meet me at sunset to-morrow near the old shieling on the shore of Loch Drummdhu.’

Her face became scarlet, and the leaflet almost fluttered from her hand. She knew only one being from whom such a message might come, and, though she had never seen the handwriting before, she felt it must be his. For a moment her head swam round, and anger, wonder, distrust,

and pleasure contended within her. He had not forgotten her. Great lord though he was, he still remembered her, and the tender greetings that had once passed between them. And he wished to meet her once more. That also was, as his poor messenger expressed it, a word of comfort. But if such was his wish, why did he not come and seek her? Why did he appoint a meeting in so solitary a place? She would not go to him; no, she dared not go. They were better far apart, since it was clear that they could now be nothing to each other.

While she stood startled and wondering, her brain full of burning fears and conjectures, Angus rolled his head at her in unaffected delight. At last she met his eyes.

‘Who gave you this?’ she asked.

‘One of his own people, miss, and my blessings on the luck it brings you. I was to give it to your own self, and let never a soul beside, not even his reverence, know it was sent you. And now tell me, pulse of my heart, when’s the wedding to be, and when is the girl with the golden hair to be the great lady of Arranmore?’

For a moment Mina looked at him in anger and surprise, but remembering his character and condition, she only smiled and shook her head. Without waiting for any further answer, Angus put his fingers on his lips as a token of secrecy, and shuffled away, followed by his canine pets.

He had not gone many yards before he turned and shuffled back again.

‘I forgot to ask you, darling—is there any answer?’

Mina shook her head again.

‘Maybe you’ll take the answer yourself,’ he cried with a grin; ‘and may my blessing and the blessing of God be along with it;’ and he shuffled away again.

Placing the paper carefully in her bosom, Mina walked slowly towards the manse. A strong impulse was upon her to go to see her uncle at once, and show him what she had received; yet an equally strong impulse, working in the intensity of her own personal passion, drew her back. It was clear that Arranmore solicited a secret meeting, and with this view had appointed a solitary time and place. Should she grant his wish? Would it be wise or maidenly to do so? She knew enough of his character to be certain

that he did not intend her any harm ; but what could he wish to say to her—what communication could he now desire to make, which could not be heard by all the world ? From her simple point of view the social distance between them seemed now quite impassable. He was a great man, she only a poor country girl, and marriage was entirely out of the question. And yet, if he did not mean to woo her again, what could be his object in desiring a meeting ? She was in a strange perplexity, and quite undecided how to act.

Love's secrecy conquered, and she did not speak to her uncle. She found him in the study flourishing a newspaper, and denouncing the ignorance and folly of a certain Lowland professor who had just had the audacity to publish, in an English

magazine, an article impugning (for the thousandth time) the genuineness of the Ossianic epos. The bulk of the article was reprinted in the columns of the *Inverness Courier*, which journal the clergyman now flourished in his hand, and made the text of his furious invective. At such a time, when the very foundations of his simple faith were threatened, all other mundane matters—even those affecting his pet child and pupil—sank into insignificance. Boiling with polemical rage, Mr. Macdonald sat down and concocted a long letter to the *Courier*, rebutting in detail the professor's arguments, exposing his ignorance, and calling him innumerable hard names in Gaelic, Greek, and Latin—all except mother English, which would have been far too unpolite. The letter appeared the week

after in all the glory of big type, interspersed with long sentences of early Gaelic, and with a foot-note expressing with how much pleasure the editor gave publicity to the opinions of 'one of our ripest Celtic scholars and profoundest believers in the genuineness of Ossian.'

On the whole Mina was glad that the occasion was inopportune, and that she could not take her uncle, that night at least, into her confidence. She carried her secret about with her all day, blushing and trembling over it, and half determining to make a clean breast of it on the morrow. She was unusually sympathetic with her uncle, listening all the evening to his ejaculations and exclamations on the subject next his heart, and once or twice taking down notes at his request; but she shrank

from Graham's gaze, and fancied that it expressed annoyance and suspicion. Graham, however, was in reality too busy with a burden of his own to think very much about hers.

Half an hour before midnight she escaped to her own room, carrying her secret and the paper with her. Undressing that night was a slow process, and even when her light was extinguished, and she wore nothing but her white night-dress, she stood for a long time at the window looking up at the mountains in the direction of Loch Drummduh. It was a moonlight night, and the peace of the silvern light was brooding upon the hills.

And if, before lying down to rest, she kissed that paper, thinking with a quick thrill of passion of one who was far away,

who shall blame her? She was only a simple girl, and the divine instinct was strong within her. That night, as she brooded over her sweet secret, while

‘ Her gentle limbs she did undress,
And lay down in her loveliness,’

she forgot altogether that he who loved her was so far above her; or, if she remembered, it was only with a proud pleasure which intensified her love.

Yes, she loved him—that night, at least—and sleep brought her many a quick and happy dream, with which his face and form were delightfully blended.

When morning came she awoke to a sharp dread. Having passed out of the fairy palace of her dreams, beautiful as the enchanted palace of Eros, in the Greek tale,

she found herself standing bewildered in the sunshine.

She took out the paper again, read it, and re-read it. No, she could not show it to her uncle—that would be breaking confidence; but she would pay no attention to its request. That was her fixed determination during the whole of the forenoon.

But as the sun moved westward there arose within her bosom the tremulous thrill which draws lover to lover wherever hearts beat and love abides. Why should she not meet him once more? Just once—just for a moment—just to tell him how unkind he had been, and how they could never meet again! Why should she not show him how little she feared him, despite his great rank and name; how calmly she could sever,

once and for always, the silken link which still held them together ?

Oh, she could be very stern and cold, and he should see that her pride was as great as his ; then he would understand her, and thenceforth leave her alone. Yes, she would go. Perhaps, after all, he only wished to ask her forgiveness, and if that were so, she could freely forgive him. As the gentle thought passed through her mind, her eyes grew dim with tears.

She looked up at the mountains. They were netted in the sheen of a golden day ; every chasm, gulch, glen, and shadow, distinct as on a map ; every thread of a stream sparkling like silver ; every dark lochan flashing like a shield.

Loch Drummdhu, though a solitary place, was not far away. She could walk there

easily in less than an hour. Yes, she would go to him. She would meet him for the last time.

Late in the afternoon she stood ready at the manse door, waiting for an opportunity of escape.

‘Where are you going?’ asked Graham, who sat on the bench at the door, reading a book.

‘Only down the clachan to see old Ailsa; she is sick again.’

‘Well, I shall walk over to Koll, and see if he is going out to-night after the mackerel. I counted fifteen solan-geese off the light-house this morning, hunting the shoal, and the cormorants were thick as a flock of starlings.’

Mina made no answer, but wandered quietly away. She was afraid to walk

rapidly, lest her brother should notice, and wonder at her haste. But the sun-rays were already reddening, and the great peaks above Loch Drummdhu were shining like molten brass. She had no time to lose if she wished to be punctual to her tryst.

Once out of sight of Graham, she hastened her footsteps, and was soon on the open heather.

The ascent to the lake was by a narrow footpath strewn with boulders, and winding by the side of a brown mountain burn.

There were no trees, except here and there a dwarf mountain ash, drooping with soft silvern leaves and crimson berries over some nut-brown pool.

Down below lay the village, scarce dis-

tinguishable from the surrounding flats, and enclosed on every side by the glimmering arms of the sea. Before her rose the low, dark mountains, so bare of herbage as scarcely to afford food even for mountain sheep; and between her and the mountains, though as yet unseen, was the lonely fresh-water lake.

As she reached the head of the ascent, where the brook emerged from the lake, a small pack of grouse flew past her at headlong speed, scattered, and fell severally into the deep heather close to her, and almost at the same moment a magnificent peregrine falcon, which was in pursuit, flashed past just over her head.

Before her lay the lake, some two miles long, one broad, black as pitch, but so shallow that here and there sharp, black

rocks jutted up like portions of sunken reefs.

In the centre were several small, green islands, covered with innumerable gulls which had flocked there to build. Large numbers of gulls and other aquatic birds were floating everywhere on the water; and high in the air, circling round and round, with harsh croaks and cries, were a pair of ravens.

The light of the setting sun crimsoned the hills beyond the lake, but scarcely changed the solemn blackness of the lake itself.

Dark and solitary as was the scene, Mina felt perfectly at home in it; her life had been passed in such places, and to her they were neither dreary nor sad. But her heart was beating wildly, her face was flushed

with fearful expectation, as she looked around her. Before her lay the lake, all round her the dark moorland and the lonely hills ; but no human form was visible as yet.

She stood hesitating, and a quick impulse came upon her to return as she had come.

Now that she was there, fearful and expectant, she dreaded the meeting for which she had hitherto been so eager.

Should she go or stay ? Perhaps he would not come at all ? Perhaps it was only a trick to try her ? Yes, she would go back home.

As she turned to retreat, a shot was fired not far away, and the next moment she saw approaching her, over a heathery knoll, the figure of a man. He advanced—she stood

still to recognise him. To her surprise she perceived, not Lord Arranmore, but the elderly baronet who was then in occupation of Coreveolan Castle.





CHAPTER VI.

MINA KEEPS TRYST.

BEHIND Sir Charles Sedley, but a hundred yards away, loomed another figure, a man in the Highland costume, holding in leash two Gordon setters. As the baronet advanced, observing Mina, he waved his hand to his attendant, who immediately, as if at an understood signal, disappeared from view. Astonished and puzzled, Mina was about to hasten away, but, quickening his footsteps

and making signals to her, Sir Charles rapidly approached. In another minute he stood before her, and saluted her politely by taking off his hat.

‘Good-afternoon, Miss Macdonald,’ he said quickly; then taking out a gold hunting-watch and touching the spring, he added, ‘I hope I am not late.’

Completely perplexed, Mina looked in his face, and trembled from head to foot. His countenance wore an expression of patronising good-nature, but his nervous manner and heightened colour showed that he was ill at ease.

She drew back, almost in alarm, and at the same moment a terrible suspicion of the truth flashed upon her. Before she could utter a word he spoke again.

‘Of course you got my letter?’

His letter? What could he mean? She gazed at him in renewed distrust.

‘Yes,’ he continued, smiling, ‘my letter asking you to meet me here at sunset. By your coming I perceive you are a young lady of sense. But perhaps the bearer mystified you, and you came here in the expectation of meeting my nephew. Never mind. The bird has flown to the lure, and I am charmed.’

It was a trap, then, to shame and humiliate her! Her face turned white as death, and, panting like a wounded deer, she gazed at her tormentor. Something in her look made him feel uncomfortable, and perhaps ashamed, at least for the moment.

Without a word she turned to depart.

‘ Stop ! ’ he cried.

She turned on him with flashing eyes, and panted :

‘ I do not know you, sir. If you have anything to say, you had better speak to my brother.’

‘ Your brother would not understand ; my business is altogether with *you*. Do, pray, hear me out. The fact is, I come on behalf of Lord Arranmore ?’

‘ Did *he* send you ?’

‘ Well, not exactly, but I think I am justified in saying that I act with his approval. Now, understand me, my dear. I won’t disguise from you the fact that when I discovered his lordship’s acquaintance with you I was angry—very angry ; for I justly considered that he had no right to trifle with your affections, knowing not

only your relative positions, but also his formal engagement to my daughter.'

'Sir——'

'My dear, hear me out. I will not assume that you love Lord Arranmore—that would be an impertinence; but I believe you have a respect for him, an interest in him, which he reciprocates even more ardently. Having this interest in him, and feeling, as I am sure you must do, that your paths in life are far apart, you would desire him to be happy.'

He paused, but Mina said nothing; so presently he continued:

'Of course he knows as well as I do that his happiness can only be compassed by marriage with my daughter. He is very fond of her, she adores him; there is only

one obstacle to their happiness at present, and that is—you !

She turned towards him her flushed and angry face, but he waved his hand to keep her silent.

‘Don’t excite yourself, my dear ; listen quietly to me, and I am sure we shall get to understand one another. Lord Arranmore is rather fond of your sex generally, and the one in whose company he happens to be is his favourite ; but through all his little escapades he has remained faithful to Ethel. Now, she is a very jealous and a very high-spirited girl ; and if, after what she saw that day on the hill, his lordship were to continue his—ahem—well, his acquaintance with you—she might, perhaps, in a moment of anger break off the match.’

‘Silence, sir!’ said Mina, now fairly beside herself with anger and mortified pride. ‘What right have you to speak to me as you do? What is Lord Arranmore to me, or I to him, that you *dare* talk to me so? Why have you brought me here with a false message? Tell me what you wish, and let me go.’

She stood gazing full into his face. The baronet returned that look with one of genuine admiration.

‘Upon my word,’ he thought, ‘the young scamp had good taste. She is a pretty creature—the sort of a rival no woman could be ashamed of.’

So lost was he in admiration, that he paused for some time before he spoke. Seeing he remained silent, Mina believed the interview to be at an end. She turned

to go, but the baronet laid his hand upon her arm and detained her.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘one word more before you go. I want you to promise——’

‘Well, sir?’

‘To promise to keep out of the way if possible of my susceptible nephew, and, if you should meet him, to give him no encouragement. I have explained his true character to you. I will not deny that your influence over him might be fatal to my hopes—that in an evil moment he might be tempted to compass your ruin!’

‘*My* ruin?’ replied Mina, in utter amazement.

‘Well, honestly, yes.’

She looked at him still in utter amazement. What he meant she could not for a moment imagine.

If he had spoken of his daughter's ruin she might have understood ; but what possible harm, she thought, beyond that which was already done, could Lord Arranmore bring to her. She looked at the baronet with eyes full of mystified wonder. He did not return the look. His eyes fell in embarrassment before Mina's steady gaze.

'What do you mean?' she asked quietly. 'I do not understand you, sir.'

'My dear young lady,' returned Sir Charles, in some hesitation, 'if I am compelled to speak plainly, believe me, I am actuated solely by a desire for your welfare. You have inspired me with a strange interest in you, and I could not stand coolly by and see you come to harm. I know that my nephew could not, under

any circumstances whatever, think of making you *his wife*; so to what, therefore, could his attentions to you lead but to utter misery ?

He paused, but Mina said nothing. She had watched and listened to every word, and as he spoke her cheek had by turns grown pale and crimson. As he looked at her, Sir Charles for the first time felt pity—such pity as he might have felt for a poor hunted deer which lay mortally wounded at his feet, and turned towards him its large, pitiful eyes as if imploring mercy. But with his pity there was no remorse. Even as he would have struck the last blow for the life-blood of the deer, he turned to give the last stab to the broken-hearted girl.

‘Miss Macdonald, you are a young lady of sense, and if you will only think over the

past, you will perceive that what I say is true. Lord Arranmore may have spoken of love—he would never have mentioned marriage, for he knew that the future Lady Arranmore was already chosen.'

'Have you done, sir?' asked Mina, when he paused again.

'I have nothing more to say, my dear, but I want your promise.'

'My promise?'

'To keep out of his lordship's way.'

'Oh, you may set your mind at rest, sir. I shall not seek Lord Arranmore, be sure of that; indeed, my greatest wish now is never to see him or any of you again.'

'Then I will take my leave. My dear Miss Macdonald, you have behaved admirably. I thank you with all my heart.'

So saying, the baronet courteously raised

his hat, and, with a stately bow, walked swiftly away. Mina did not move; when he bowed she coldly bent her head, and wearily watched him as he moved away. When he had disappeared, and she found herself entirely alone, with the solitary hills all round her and night coming on, she sat down on the thick purple heather, and, covering her face with both her hands, burst into tears.

Mina was not usually given to crying, but her heart was full to bursting that night, for she felt that her trouble was growing almost too much for her to bear. Insult after insult was being heaped upon her to make her degradation complete. She thought over the baronet's words, and each one was like a sharp sting—all the more poignant because of its truth. For they

were true—that assurance at least she must take to her heart, although by so doing she felt that her whole life was blighted. The man to whom she had given all her faith, all her love, had come to her with a lie upon his lips, and brought her only shame and sorrow.

For a time the bitter tears flowed unrestrained; then, still sobbing, she raised her head and looked around her. Night had crept on apace. The ranges of mountain were blackened with shadows, and far out at sea the last grey gleams of light were dying; she could hear all around her the soft cry of the night-birds, and the faint, far-off murmur of the sea. Her heart was aching terribly, and her bosom still heaved with hysterical sobs.

‘Thank God I did not cry before that

man !' she said to herself. ' I felt my heart was bursting at every word he spoke, but I would not cry—I would not show a sign—not before *him*. Oh, he has been very cruel ; may God forgive him for all he has done to me ! Well, I will go home. I will try to forget all this—and *him* !—all his cruelty, all his wickedness. The thought of his love was only a beautiful dream. I am waking now !'

She rose and walked slowly through the ever-thickening darkness towards her home.





CHAPTER VII.

GLENHEATHER LODGE.

WELL satisfied with the result of his interview, the baronet made his way back to his keeper, who lay awaiting him in the long heather.

‘Let the dogs work,’ he said; ‘I’ll shoot my way back to the lodge.’

An hour’s shooting in the direction of the mountains brought him in sight of a small house, situated right at the foot of

the hills, and surrounded on every side by excellent ground for grouse. It was one of the outlying shooting-lodges belonging to Coreveolan, and was comfortably furnished for the convenience of sportsmen beating that part of the mountains. Castle Coreveolan itself lay a good five miles away as the crow flies, over a very difficult stretch of country; and Sir Charles had walked over that morning along a bridle-path through the hills.

At the door of the lodge, as he approached it, panting and perspiring, he found his daughter, coquettishly attired in a costume of heather-coloured mixture and a hat to match, trimmed with the feathers from a cormorant's breast.

'Here I am, papa,' she cried, 'first to arrive, you see, and I have already put the

house in order. Welcome to Glenheather Lodge !'

'How did you come ?' asked Sir Charles, sitting down on the heather before the door.

'On the back of Sheelah,' she replied, pointing to a shaggy pony which was grazing close by, attended by a ragged Highland boy, 'Malcolm Beg was my cavalier, and I find I have made quite a conquest.'

'Where's Lawrance ?' asked Sir Charles, sharply.

'I left him at the castle, sulking as usual.'

'Wouldn't he come ?'

'I didn't ask him, and he didn't volunteer. He expects us back to-morrow, but I shan't go. Glenheather Lodge for me ! It is

twice as pleasant as that dreary, damp, dilapidated old castle, and I mean to stay in it a fortnight at least.'

'Nonsense !'

'It isn't nonsense, papa ; it's capital. All the furniture is made of nice, clean, new deal, and, instead of boards in the kitchen, the floor is strewn with thyme and sweet-smelling heather. There's a cow to give us milk, and a little Highland girl to milk it, and an old woman to cook the mutton and the game, plenty of new-laid eggs to be had in the village, any amount of fresh air, nobody to bore us, and such a view ! I think I shall turn female hermit, and live here for ever.'

So saying, she led the way into the lodge ; and when the baronet had changed his clothes and boots, and entered the little

dining-room as hungry as a raven, he was fain to confess that Glenheather Lodge was very pleasant quarters. A bright fire of turf was burning in the grate, the table was spread with a snowy cloth, and old Janet, who kept the lodge, while her husband watched the game, had prepared a very good Highland dinner, to be washed down with champagne, which had been brought over, with other good things, on a pony's back. To crown all, there were two arm-chairs, one on either side of the fire, and each affording the sort of lounge which weary sportsmen love after a long day's shooting.

Dinner over, Sir Charles lit his cigar, and felt particularly comfortable. Ethel now expected him to doze off for the evening, in the interesting manner of Highland

sportsmen ; but he kept awake, and presently became conversational.

‘ I’ve just been having rather an interesting interview,’ he said. ‘ Can you guess with whom ?’

Ethel shook her head.

‘ I met, down yonder, Lawrance’s heroine, the old clergyman’s niece. We had a long conversation.’

He thought it quite unnecessary to mention that the meeting was not accidental, but prearranged. Ethel looked interested, but affected a certain unconcern, and waited for her father to explain matters at length, which he presently proceeded to do.

‘ It is clear that Lawrance has put a bit of nonsense in the girl’s head, and I’m afraid she doesn’t quite perceive the gulf there is between them. She’s not bad-

looking, but a bit of a fool. I had quite to argue it out with her before she would admit the absurdity of her conduct in thinking any more about Lawrance.'

'I wonder you took the trouble,' returned Ethel, petulantly. 'I'm sure she's welcome to him, for all I care.'

'Absurd!'

'The whole thing is absurd, papa, and humiliating into the bargain. I believe Lawrance prefers this wild young woman of the mountains—at any rate his connection with her was more than a mere flirtation, and he mopes day and night about her still. I have made up my mind, and I shall release him from his engagement.'

'What!' cried Sir Charles, in unaffected astonishment.

'I am tired of running up and down the

world after a lover who does not care for me, and who likes any society—even that of a dairy-maid or a scullion—better than mine. We were betrothed before either of us knew our own minds. Our betrothal was a farce, which is now over, and I mean to bring down the curtain at once.'

Sir George rose to his feet, and stood on the hearthrug scowling down at his daughter.

'You're talking bosh, Ethel, and you know it. You *must* marry Lawrance; I have set my mind upon it.'

'Can't be done, papa.'

'Lawrance is very fond of you, and has no desire whatever to break his engagement, but you know his impetuosity. By some means or other this artful young woman has managed, by thrusting herself forward

and making eyes at him, to flatter his vanity, and, though he does not care a pin about her, he fancies that she is enamoured of him, and that he is to blame for having given her encouragement. Leave it all to me ; I'll guarantee that Lawrance does his duty by you, and in a few months you will be Lady Arranmore.'

Ethel answered with a mere shrug of the shoulders and an incredulous smile. The *tête-à-tête* lasted a little longer, but contained nothing else worthy of remark. In her heart Ethel had just then no intention of breaking finally with her lover, though she was grieved at his neglect, and could not help expressing a little indignation. Her engagement to him had become such a settled thing, such a changeless portion of her daily life and thought, that she clung

to it as one clings to an old dress—from habit even more than affection. It would cost her a pang to break it finally and to get accustomed to the change.

Next morning it was pouring wet, but it cleared up a little after breakfast, and Sir Charles sallied forth with his deer-stalking rifle, anxious to inspect a certain defile in the mountains where there was a chance of a red deer.

Left to herself, Ethel tried to read, and yawned over a novel; then tripped out to the kitchen and chatted for a time with old Janet. Glenheather Lodge was rather tiresome, she began to think, in wet weather.

At last a thought seemed to strike her. Donning a waterproof cloak and a pair of thick boots, she walked out, and, as if by

instinct, took the path which led to the village, a couple of miles away.

Her path at first lay through a splendid tract of deep heather, on which the sun was just beginning to shine. She looked around her with no very profound enjoyment of the lovely scene. Larks were singing, the cock-grouse was crowing, the mountain hare was 'running races in his mirth,' but her thoughts were far away. In her opinion the prospect would have been charming but for one embellishment which it sadly lacked—a person of the opposite sex with whom to flirt.

She came down along the banks of Loch Drummdhu, past the very spot where her father and Mina Macdonald met on the previous evening. Here, indeed, an object of interest attracted her attention. At first

she thought it was a mossy stone hewn in likeness of a man—it kept so silent and so still; but, on a closer inspection, she saw it was a man indeed, very old, with hair as white as snow, and face as grave as granite, sitting on the shore of the lonely lake, and looking silently at the dark waters, the screaming sea-gulls, the drifting clouds.

As she came close, he looked up with a gaze of strange intensity, but made no sign.

‘Good-morning,’ she was constrained to say.

His lips moved, but he did not answer. She examined him more closely. His wild white hair, his worn face, his strange eyes, his ragged gown, all filled her with curiosity.

‘A strange creature,’ she reflected.

‘Looks like a hobgoblin of the mountain, or a fossil man fast coming back to life. How he stares! I suppose he never saw a lady before in all his life.’

‘Koll!’ cried a voice below them.

Koll Nicholson, for it was he, rose to his feet, towering above her like one of the heroes of Ossian. She looked round, and there, emerging from the side of the brook, was another figure, agile this time and young, carrying a single-handed trout-rod, and holding up to view a fresh-run sea-trout of about a pound, which he had just landed from a pool below.

At a glance she recognised Graham Macdonald.

As his eyes fell upon her he started, turned red as crimson, and stood hesitating what to do; but, advancing with her

brightest smile, she at once greeted him by name.

Thus addressed, he strode forward, and tossed the fish to Koll, who immediately thrust it into a canvas bag made for the purpose; then, still flushing crimson, he lifted his Scotch cap.

He wore the Highland dress, which well became his youthful frame and shapely limbs; and Ethel thought as she gazed upon him that she had never looked upon anyone so handsome.

‘I see you are fishing,’ she said. ‘Pray, who is your attendant?’

‘He? Oh, that is Koll Nicholson, an old boatman, and sort of foster-father to my sister and myself.’

‘How interesting! Can he speak English?’

‘Pretty well when he chooses, but he prefers his mother-tongue.’

‘Far better, I am sure, than our insipid Saxon. What a grand old ruin of a man!—like an old castle on a promontory, grim, stern, solemn, and splendid, though all tumbling to pieces!’

As she spoke, she eyed the old man critically, as she might inspect some inanimate stone, or picture, or old curiosity. Koll, for his part, stood almost motionless with his keen eyes fixed upon her. It was difficult to read the expression on his face, but it seemed to express strong suspicion and dislike, blended with a certain admiration.

At this point, Graham said something rapidly in Gaelic, and Koll answered with a harsh, peculiar laugh; then, dropping his

eyes and averting his head, the old man passed rapidly over the knoll by which Graham had ascended.

Ethel seemed relieved at his departure, and turned brightly to Graham.

‘Are you not surprised to see me here?’ she said, smiling; ‘we are stopping for a few days at Glenheather Lodge.’

‘Is Lord Arranmore with you?’

‘No; I am alone with papa. By the way, Mr. Macdonald, how is your charming sister?’

Graham’s brow darkened, and he replied carelessly enough. His bearing towards his companion was a curious mixture of timidity and self-assertion. Tangled in the net of her elegance and beauty, he struggled to seem proud, easy, and free; but his eyes, when they met hers, burned with dangerous

fire. Confident in her superiority, as she conceived, she enjoyed his passionate uneasiness, and delighted in the admiration he struggled in vain to conceal. Just then, in the pride of her high-born grace and beauty, she looked witching beyond measure, while with heightened colour, heaving bosom, and sparkling eyes, she gazed upon the young Highlander.

He would gladly have escaped, but her charm held him like a hand.

‘When I met you at Lady Murray’s,’ she said, ‘you were preparing to enter the Church; are you ordained yet, or have you changed your mind?’

As she asked the question she glanced significantly at the young man’s very unclerical costume, and smiled. His cheek flushed as he replied :

‘Yes, I have changed my mind ; I’m not the right sort of stuff for a minister. I would rather any day be fishing a stream, or flying a hawk, than blethering in a pulpit. Besides, I hate all black coats, and would rather sport the red.’

‘But your uncle——’

‘He is one in a thousand—a good man, and not a humbug. If I were like him, half as clever or half as good, I might follow the same vocation ; but, as it is, I am only fit for a roving life, like the life of a seal or a red-deer.’

He spoke impulsively, with flashing eyes and swelling nostrils, and, while recklessly depreciating himself, shone forth in the full strength of his manhood. Certainly no tone could have suited him better, or made

him more attractive in the eyes of his fair companion.

‘Why not enter the army?’ she said, thinking as she spoke what a splendid soldier he would make.

‘I’ve been speaking of that, but my uncle hates soldiers as much as I hate priests. I’m thinking I’ll just have to emigrate, and try my fortune in Australia or New Zealand.’

‘That would be hard—to have to leave your native country, I mean.’

He looked at her intently, and then said, raising his voice :

‘Not harder than to be what I am—by birth and ancestry a gentleman, and yet almost a beggar, through the wickedness and stupidity of my own folk.’

‘I do not understand!’

‘ Little more than fifty years ago all these lands for a circle of three miles round Loch Drummdhu belonged to my father’s father, and they would have been ours still if the old fool had not preferred drink and devilry to decent living and fair play. He fooled away the heritage, and it passed over at last to the lords of Arranmore. Well, it was not a grand birthright, but it was better than nothing ; and if I had my rights I should at least be the laird of my own soil.’

This was really interesting ! Ethel’s eyes opened, and saw in Graham—almost a new being—a ruined lord of the soil, proud and poor as Edgar of Ravenswood. What had previously seemed rude assurance now looked like splendid pride.

‘ Is Lady Murray any relation of yours ?’ she said.

‘A distant one on the mother’s side. She belonged to the Macleods of Macleod, my mother’s people.’

‘And the lords of Arranmore bought your estate?’

‘Bought it, or stole it, or lied for it,’ said Graham, quickly. ‘A lie would go a long gait in these days, and it became theirs. I cannot even shoot a hare or a moor-fowl on my own heather without his lordship’s leave.’

‘It does seem unfair,’ she said very softly. ‘Is Lord Arranmore aware of this?’

‘Not from me, and it would disturb him little if he knew. The Arranmores have lived little on their own acres, but have preferred to dwell in foreign parts, draw the rents when due, and leave the rest to the

factor. . . . But I'm speaking of your own kith and kin ; I beg your pardon.'

'Not at all,' returned Ethel ; 'indeed I sympathise with you, and I am sure Lord Arranmore, when I tell him, will do so too.'

This was touching on a dangerous chord, as Ethel discovered in a moment.

'I want no man's sympathy,' exclaimed Graham, with an angry gesture, 'least of all——'

Here he paused, conquering himself with an effort ; then, to end the interview, he raised his cap and turned away.

But she called him back. He turned to her, not without a certain irritation.

'Will you tell your sister how much I would like to call upon her ? May I do so, do you think, while I am staying at the lodge ?'

‘Of course, if you wish it,’ answered Graham, somewhat amazed at the request.

‘Then I will come.’

Graham made no further reply, but, lifting his hat again and raising his rod from the ground, stalked rapidly away in the direction taken by his foster-father. Following the windings of the stream, and leaping lightly over every impediment, he at last came to the height immediately above the manse.

Here he found Koll Nicholson waiting, seated quietly on a great stone. As he came up, flushed and panting, the old man turned his head, looked at him with a keen, hawk-like eye, but kept quite still upon his seat.

‘Wha will pe yonder?’ he asked, in a low, harsh voice.

‘The lady?’ said Graham, with a laugh. ‘That is the young English lady living with her father at Castle Coreveolan.’

Koll gave a grunt, and plunged again into silence; then, after a long pause, he spoke again:

‘She’s bonnie, but I dinna trust her; and, bonnie as she is, I would thraw her neck if I thought she meant any harm to Mina.’

‘Harm to Mina! What nonsense you’re talking!’

‘Maybe aye and maybe no; but we’ll bide and see. What brings the leddy here?’

‘They are staying at the lodge.’

‘And the young laird—where is he?’

‘How should I know? At the bottom of the salt sea, for all I care!’

So saying, the young man strode homeward, while Koll remained quietly sitting in the same place like one in a sort of dream. The old man's brow was black and his countenance troubled, and he muttered angrily to himself. At last, rising to his feet, he gazed up the hillside towards the rugged mountains which surrounded Glenheather Lodge, and, reaching out his skinny hand, which trembled with agitation, he murmured aloud, in the Gaelic language :

‘The land belonged to the Macdonalds, and it shall come back to the Macdonalds. Dinna think, my brave leddy, to come between my bairn and her birthright, for it canna be. Ye're bonnie, and wicked as bonnie, and ye've an eye like hers that beguiled the strong man in the Book and robbed him o' his hair ; but keep awa' from

my door, and from my bairn's door, my leddy, if ye're as wise as ye're wicked. I would put a knife into yer heart, bonnie lamb as ye are, if ye meant any harm to me or mine !"

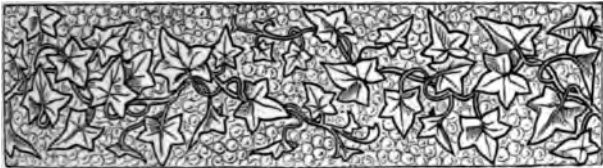
As he stood thus murmuring to himself, Koll looked positively baleful. His hair fell like snow around his deeply-wrinkled face, his eyes gleamed with unnatural lustre, and his form shook with the violence of some malignant passion. He remained for some time in the same attitude, as if pointing at some unseen object ; then, recovering himself with a harsh croak of laughter, he moved slowly down the hill.

Meantime, quite unconscious of the old man's threat or warning, which she would have found utterly irrelevant even if it had reached and been translated to her, Ethel

was gaily hastening towards Glenheather Lodge. She was quite delighted with her morning's adventure, and her conversation with Graham Macdonald. The place had acquired a new interest in her eyes, now that she had discovered in Graham so many of the characteristics of the hero of romance.

'It is just "tit for tat,"' she said to herself. 'Lawrance has amused himself with the sister, and the brother will do very well to flirt with until I return to town.'





CHAPTER VIII.

GRAHAM BECOMES ENTHRALLED.

LT was with no little difficulty that Mina Macdonald, after her interview with Sir Charles Sedley, concealed her deep trouble from her uncle and her brother. The wound of these cruel words had gone right to her heart, and the pain was almost too much to bear. All day long she tried to keep calm, forcing her tears down and speaking little; but her nights were spent in crying, and whenever

she could she escaped out upon the water or up to the lonely hillside. It has been truly and beautifully said by the wisest poet of this century that—

‘Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her;’

and certainly the mighty mother, on this occasion, succoured her favourite child. If she had not sometimes wandered forth, and poured out her heart to the answering waves or the roaring torrent, she would have utterly broken down. She took a strange pleasure at that time in roaming to some solitary headland, and, seated on a rock, with her cheek upon her hand, crooning snatches of old songs, Celtic and English, by the hour together. She had always loved to be alone; now her love for solitude became a passion.

Her uncle, absorbed in his favourite subject, and deep then in the throes of a ferocious newspaper controversy as to whether Ossian himself was a warrior or only a bard, scarcely noticed any change in her, though once or twice he remarked that she seemed unusually pale; but Graham, with a keener perception and quicker suspicion, soon saw that she was fretting, without guessing any new or unexplained cause. 'She is moping after the laird,' he thought to himself, and cursed Arranmore in his heart of hearts.

With regard to his own encounter with Miss Sedley he was quite silent for some days; but one morning, when Mina looked unusually ill, and was hurrying hastily away from the manse to seek one of her favourite haunts on the

sea-shore, he hastened after her, and called her back.

‘Do you know there are folk up there at the lodge?’ he asked; adding in answer to a quick questioning look which passed across her face, ‘No, *he* is not there. Only the young lass and her father.’

‘How do you know?’

‘I met her by accident on the hillside. She minded me, and was civil enough. What do you think she means to do? To call and see you one of these fine days.’

‘No, no!’ cried Mina, with an expression of positive terror.

‘She inquired after you quite kindly. If she comes, what shall you do?’

‘Keep away. Oh, Graham, do you think she will dare?’

‘Dare?’

'I don't mean that, but do you think she will come? What does she want with me? I do not know her, and she is so proud.'

Graham smiled, with an air of pleasant experience.

'She's a lady, at any rate, and worthy a dozen of the man she is engaged to marry.'

'To marry?'

'Yes,' answered Graham, now frowning gloomily. 'Don't you know? They have been engaged since they were bairns. The villain knew that when he ran down here with his lies and his smooth face: yet for all that he came courting to you. And *you* have not forgotten him, Mina? Do you think that I am blind? Day and night you keep grieving after him, even though

you know he woos another lass, and that he is the Laird of Arranmore.'

Pale as death, Mina turned her eyes on her brother, and her voice was thick with tears.

'I'm not grieving after him, Graham. What is Lord Arranmore to me?'

'No more than yon bit of lint-white cloud on the sky ; but, for all that, you pine and you pine till your cheeks are like a wraith's. Mina, my lass,' he continued, taking her hand, 'be wise. Try to forget him. Try to think he never came this way.'

Without answering, Mina drew her hand away, with a gesture so infinitely sad and pathetic that Graham was touched to the heart. Trembling with eagerness to hide her pain, she hurried away till her slight

figure was hidden from sight in a turn of the lonely road. Graham watched it disappear, and then, with another exclamation not flattering to the cause of so much sorrow, stalked moodily back to the house.

That afternoon, as the family sat together over their frugal dinner, Mr. Macdonald informed Graham and Mina, who had been absent all day, that he had had a visitor.

‘As winsome a one,’ he said merrily, ‘as even an old bachelor would care to entertain. She came into my dingy study like a glint of sunlight, and I gave her a Highland welcome. And she is as wise as winsome. I read to her my last letter in the *Courier*, translating to her the Gaelic and the Latin phrases, and she thought my arguments perfectly overwhelming. A very well-informed young lady indeed.’

‘Miss Sedley, of course,’ said Graham, while Mina sat silent, trembling in her chair.

‘The best of these true aristocrats,’ proceeded the clergyman, nodding, ‘is their perfect freedom from all that constitutes vulgar pride. This young lady—*simplex munditiis*, as Horace expresses it—is a perfect example of gentle breeding. Mina, my bairn, she asked particularly after *you*, and seemed sadly chagrined when she found you not at home. You must see her!’

‘I *have* seen her,’ said Mina, quickly.

‘You have had but a glimpse of her, just as I myself had, and not under favourable circumstances. When you know more of her you will like her well. It is not often in these savage regions, this *ultima Thule*, that you have an opportunity of perceiving

how a real lady looks, speaks, and acts. Well, she is coming again, and you will have an opportunity of enjoying her company. She is greatly interested in old Highland poetry, and I have promised to read aloud to her a part of my blank verse translation of Selma.'

In good truth the young lady, with the finesse habitual to her, had fooled the old clergyman completely by mounting him at once on his favourite hobby, and expressing the utmost sympathy and interest during all the pranks he made it play. No man, however old-fashioned and pedantic, is altogether proof against genuine loveliness, and Mr. Macdonald, though a clergyman, fully appreciated a pretty face, so that the conquest was complete. Graham listened to his uncle's panegyrics, and in his heart

echoed every word of them, for it is needless to say that his sullen spirit had yielded completely to Ethel's subtle charm of face and manner. But Mina listened in despair. Every word was like a dagger in her heart, since she thought, 'It is *she*, this perfect creature whom he is to marry, and she is worthy of him; while I am a poor girl, just like the dust beneath her feet.'

Graham watched his sister in silence, and hated young Arranmore tenfold. He hated him for having encouraged the simple day-dream which was breaking Mina's heart, but he hated him as much for having possession of the pretty being who seemed to exert so strange a fascination on all she met—even on himself.

Since he had, in a moment of impulse, submitted his heart to Ethel on the subject

of the family misfortunes, he felt his pride increase in proportion to his sense of grievance. Then he reflected bitterly that the broad acres possessed by his grandfather had not only been squandered away, but had actually gone to swell the lands of Arranmore.

With more than one imprecation he named the young laird's name, and felt a furious impulse to be at his throat.

The next day Graham's feet were drawn, by irresistible fascination, to the spot where he had encountered Miss Sedley. He hung for hours about under pretence of fishing, but she did not appear, and he returned home in no very amiable temper.

The next day he was there again, fishing-rod in hand, and casting wistful glances up towards Glenheather Lodge; and on this

occasion she came even more bright and radiant than before, for it was a summer day, and she seemed to share its golden splendour.

‘How glad I am to have met you!’ she exclaimed, holding out her little gloved hand. ‘I was just on my way to visit your sister.’

He had never held her hand before, since the day when he had met her in Edinburgh. He clasped it now with a strange thrill of pleasure, for the hand-shake seemed to put them on a new equality once and for ever.

‘I was so charmed with your uncle,’ she continued softly, as he relinquished his hold with an unconscious pressure. ‘He is so learned, yet so simple and grand, and his manners have the fine stateliness of the

old school. Did he tell you that I had called ?

‘He did,’ answered Graham, smiling ; ‘and sang your praises as bravely as one of the old bards.’

‘He is so different to our English ministers, who think of nothing but port-wine and plum-pudding. At Feltham, where we generally spend the winter, the rector has two thousand a year, and gives one hundred and fifty to his curate, who does all the work, while he himself spends his days in drinking and gormandising. It is so different here ! You Scotch are so grand, so manly and true ! One feels quite ashamed to come from our frivolous world of fashion into a place where all is natural, noble, yet utterly without pretence !’

The crowning praise made the young Highlander flush with pleasure. He had hitherto feared that the beautiful English girl despised him in her heart, and now she showed how mistaken he had been. His heart bounded, and he answered her look of admiration with another almost as bold.

Their eyes met, and, as if abashed by his bold gaze, she drooped hers to the ground.

At that moment he could have worshipped her. Her beauty dazzled him, but her sympathy choked him with rapture.

He answered in a tone of depreciation, through which she penetrated in a moment.

‘It is a wild place,’ he said, ‘and we are

a wild people. True, my sister and myself have had some advantages not shared by the other folk of the place, but our life is a dreary one, and you would not care to share it long.'

'Do *you* find it dreary, Mr. Macdonald?' she murmured softly.

'Sometimes—not always,' he replied; then, with his face brightening to a smile, he added, 'I do not find it dreary *now*.'

They were wandering very slowly down the hillside in the direction of the clachan, she pausing every now and again to gaze around her, he following quietly by her side.

In the course of those few minutes she knew that she had mastered this fiery spirit, and that she might now do with him as she pleased.

She was used to such conquests, and, to do her justice, seldom pursued them very far.

But in the character of Graham Macdonald there was something wilder, stronger, darker, and more dangerous than in the characters to which she was accustomed, and she began to feel a peculiar zest in arousing his dormant passions.

Physically he was a giant to her—could have crushed her at a blow, taken possession of her with a finger-touch. She admired his strength, and would have delighted in stirring it to the depths; but she little guessed what kind of storm she might arouse if she went too far.

She had begun idly, with no idea that the lightness of her sympathy would awaken serious moods; but she already began to

guess with what sort of man she had to deal.

She had no intention whatever of compromising herself in the slightest degree, though she longed eagerly for a few skirmishes of real flirtation. She saw at once, however, that she must proceed cautiously, or the young Highlander, with the pride and courage of his race, might encroach.

She did not greatly care, however, what gusts of passion she aroused, so long as, whatever happened, she left the way clear behind her for rapid retreat.

Graham had little experience of the world, and had not learned to discount the fine phrases and pretty compliments, helped home by winning looks, which the young lady showered upon him. He was ready on the

instant, and at a word, to take her brightest jest for passionate earnest.

He had moved little in drawing-rooms, and had never encountered even the commonplace coquette, whose appetite for admiration counterfeits love's tender meaning on the most trivial occasions.

He did not understand how eyes may shine with witching sweetness, hands give tenderest pressure, while all the time the moving principle of intercourse is what Heine calls 'a little heart of ice.'

In short, he was at the mercy of the first woman of the world who, with good looks and grace to aid her, might choose to make a conquest of his life.

They passed down the hillside to the manse, and found Mr. Macdonald standing at the door with the county newspaper in

his hand. He welcomed Ethel warmly, and led her gaily in.

‘Fetch Mina,’ he said to Graham. ‘Tell her that Miss Sedley is here.’

Graham walked from room to room of the house, but Mina was not to be found. Then he walked out, searched the little garden, looked up and down the shore, but could not find her.

Returning to the manse, he told the result of his search.

‘Where can the child have gone?’ exclaimed the old minister. ‘She was there but a few minutes ago.’

Graham shook his head and looked annoyed, for he was tolerably certain that his sister had crept out of the way on purpose.

Ethel said nothing, and chatting on,

seemed to have forgotten Mina's existence. But in her heart she was quite certain that Mina wished to avoid her, and it made her rather angry.

Both Graham and Miss Sedley were correct in their surmises. Mina was at that moment in the small boat, rowing rapidly away in the direction of Koll Nicholson's cottage. Having caught a glimpse of the visitor coming down the hill, she had hastened to the shore, cast the boat loose, leapt in, and rowed off without a word.





CHAPTER IX.

KOLL'S WITCHCRAFT.

LEAVING Graham to feast his eyes on the fair Saxon, and to listen to her with delight as she prattled to his uncle, let us follow poor Mina, as with pale cheek and heavy heart she rowed up the ever-winding fjord.

Fortunately the tide was flowing, so that it was scarcely necessary to use the oars ; here and there it boiled with furious eddies, again it shot rapidly on between narrowing

shores, and yet again it broadened out into quiet, green lagoons.

The manner in which the arms of the sea wound and wound everywhere into the land was indeed wonderful to behold, and so many were the twists and turns that no one but a native of the place could have found her way.

Instead of going direct to Koll's abode, Mina suffered the boat to drift a long way up the winding creeks of the fjord. Great flocks of curlew flew screaming over the banks, at almost every promontory a heron rose and flapped away with slow waft of wing, and broods of eider-duck were swimming everywhere along the shore. Mina saw and heard nothing. Her thoughts were too full of other things.

At last, running the boat into a creek

and securing it by the rope, she hastened back overland to Koll's cabin. What impulse led her there at all she could hardly have told, and indeed she did not pause to inquire. She sought her foster-father from old habit, certain of sympathy, however strange and silent, in his company.

The door stood wide open, and looking in, she saw the old man sitting, with his back to her, in the dim, Rembrandtish light of the hut.

She was about to utter his name, when something in his appearance arrested her attention, and at the same moment she heard him muttering wildly to himself. She crept nearer, and, without being heard or seen, looked over his shoulder.

He was crouching over the fire, and in his hand he held what at first seemed a

handful of black mud, but which was in reality a rough clay model of the human figure. Between his teeth he held several large pins, detaching which, one by one, he deliberately perforated the figure in his hand.

‘Tak’ *that*, and *that*, tamn you ! to close your wicked een,’ he said, suiting the action to the word, and sticking two pins in the figure’s face. ‘And tak’ anither, tamn you ! through the heid and through the brain, and one now right through your heart, and your liver, and your lungs, you teevil’s-limb ! and now I will place you in the fire, tamn you ! and as the fire burns, may your soul burn in the fire of hell, and may you wither and waste away, if you meddle with me and mine !’

Nothing could exceed the suppressed fury

with which the old man spoke, perforating his clay victim at every word. As he placed it on the blazing fire, Mina touched him on the arm, and he started as if stung.

‘Why, Koll, what are you doing?’

He stretched out both his arms and took her hand.

‘She is only charming away a witch, my bairn,’ he said with a sly smile.

‘I know what it is,’ said Mina, ‘and it is a wicked thing to do even to a person you hate. God is angry at such things, though they are only superstition.’

‘Maype, maype,’ answered Koll, cunningly, ‘it is supersteetion. She is an old man, and was only trying the charm for fun. Sit toon and let me look at you, my bairn.’

She took a stool by his side, and he gazed long and eagerly into her face.

‘You have been grieving sair,’ he said, ‘and greeting again, for the marks of saut tears are on your ’een. Na, na ; you needna shake your heid, for she can tell weel the pain ye thole. But never fear, my bairn. The trouble will pass away. The old man has had a dream, and in her dream she saw a praw kirk and heard the wedding pells.’

As he spoke, Mina leant forward and attempted to take the clay figure from the fire. With a cry Koll interfered, and drew back her hand.

‘Tinna touch her,’ he exclaimed. ‘Tinna free her, but let her burn ! It is only a witch the old man is charming away !’

‘Who is it that you hate so much ?’ asked Mina. ‘A man or a woman ?’

Koll gave his peculiar laugh.

'Maybe it would pe a man, and maybe it would pe a woman. It would preak the charm to tell.'

'Do you think God is pleased with such things? It is wicked even to think of them.'

'She does not work the charm to please God, but to anger the deevil.'

'But God teaches us to love our enemies—not to wish them such cruel harm.'

'She will love her own enemies, tann them! but she canna love the enemies of her bairn,' answered Koll, again taking the girl's hand and holding it in his. 'In the old man's dream there was a tanned witch, and it is a charm to drive the tanned witch awa'.'

Mina smiled and shook her head. She

little guessed at that moment that the witch of Koll's dream and the visitor who had that day frightened her from the manse were one and the same being. With an instinct peculiar to him, Koll had grasped the whole situation at a glance. He knew of his foster-child's love for Arranmore, and he knew also of Arranmore's engagement to the English girl. One glimpse of Ethel Sedley had been enough. He saw that she was too beautiful a rival to be despised, and he credited her with the fullest powers of natural and unnatural witchcraft. Hence his endeavour to defeat her ends and confuse her spells, by means of the familiar old Highland charm.



CHAPTER X.

FACTOR AND LORD.

LEFT by himself in Castle Coreveolan, the young Lord of Arranmore had full time and opportunity to survey the situation in which he found himself placed. Anything more unpleasant could scarcely be conceived. While finally plighted to one woman, his equal in social position, and far more than his equal in worldly fortune, he had slowly drifted into passionate intimacy with one who was not

only his social inferior, but without a penny in the world ; and he had done this, moreover, under circumstances which certainly reflected little credit on his own moral character. Had he in the first instance appeared before Mina Macdonald, without any disguise, as a nobleman and the master of the soil, she would never, it was quite certain, have opened her heart to his influence. But coming as an equal, appealing to her sympathy with all the grace of unreserved communion, admitted to the fullest and freest intercourse with herself and her guardian, he had suffered her heart to open gradually, like a blossom, to his personal influence, and at last to expand fearlessly in the warm light of virginal passion and first love. Then had come, like a thunderclap, the betrayal of his

identity, and he had shrunk away with a guilty sense of shame, irresolute what to do or say.

‘I am a villain!’ he exclaimed to himself a thousand times; ‘I am as much a villain as if I had betrayed her in act and left her to die, for I have betrayed her soul, and God knows if she will ever recover the wound I have dealt her.’

‘How am I to make amends?’

Had he been able to break at once with his cousin, there is no doubt that in some moment of impulse he would have cut the knot of his dilemma, and boldly offered marriage to Mina, for he did full justice to her character, and felt that (morally and intellectually) she was worthy to become his wife. But he was doubly and trebly pledged to Ethel, and that young lady had

never shown any inclination to give him his release. So far as he knew, she loved him, though her love was a very different kind of flame to that which burned in the simple heart of Mina Macdonald. He could not forsake her without exposing himself to the reproaches of his own conscience, as well as to the harsh judgment of the world.

It was a great relief to his mind when his uncle went over to spend a few days at Glenheather Lodge, taking his daughter with him. Lord Arranmore calmly excused himself, and remained in moody abstraction at the castle. He was a little astonished, however, when nearly a week passed without his uncle's return. At the end of a week a ragged messenger brought him a curt epistle from his cousin.

‘DEAR LAWRANCE,

‘We are in love with Glenheather Lodge, and want to stay another week. Papa has killed what he calls a stag of ten, and is enraptured with his own powers. Won’t you come over and join us? or do you prefer that stupid old castle?’

‘ETHEL.’

This was at least a respite, for as yet he felt he could not bear his cousin’s gaze. He sent a hasty message, saying that he would come, but fixing no day; then he again gave himself up to lonely walks and self-reproaches. Had he known that Glenheather Lodge was quite so near to the manse of Uribol, he would doubtless have hastened over at once, for already he felt a wild longing to see Mina again, and to beg

her forgiveness. His knowledge of the district, however, was still rather confused, and he did not suspect for a moment that the two houses were only a few miles, as the crow flies, asunder. Meantime the news had spread that the young Lord of Arranmore had returned to his ancestral acres; and one morning as he looked out he beheld a crowd of men, women, and children, for the most part in rags, thronging on the castle lawn. Directly they caught a glimpse of him they uttered a feeble cheer. Touching the bell he summoned a servant.

‘Who are these people?’ he asked.

The man, who had come with the Sedleys from the south, gave a grin.

‘Some of your lordship’s servants, I believe.’

‘What do they want here?’

‘Don’t exactly know, my lord. They say they want to give your lordship a welcome home.’

Looking rather foolish, Arranmore walked to the window again. Another feeble cheer went up from the crowd.

‘Rag fair,’ he muttered; ‘they look like the sweepings of a poorhouse infirmary. Well, I suppose I must speak to them, and gladden their hearts with a little mountain dew.’

So, putting on his hat, he went out among them, and thereupon became the centre of an enthusiastic circle. Old men and women seized and kissed his hand, many sank on their knees before him, some wept, others shouted—in fact, altogether there was an ovation. The enthusiasm rose

to positive madness when he informed them that whisky would be dispensed to them at once ; and when the whisky came even the little children tasted and drank his lordship's health.

But among the assembled crowd there were not a few who remained silent and gloomy, and who gazed at the young lord with a certain prophetic dread. One of them, a gaunt elderly man, in positive rags, at last approached the young lord, and, fixing on him a lack-lustre eye, said, in a hoarse, broken voice :

‘ Will your lordship be geeving me back the land Peter-na-Croiche took awa’ ?’

‘ Who are you ?’ asked Arranmore.

‘ I am Tonalld Paterson, him they call big Tonalld o’ the Glen. Will your lordship be geeving me back my goot land ?’

‘What do you mean? Have you been evicted?’

‘I have been turned off the land, and my hoose has been pulled doon, and my wife and bairns, and my father and my mother, are sleeping oot on the cold ground.’

‘Is what the man says true?’ asked Arranmore, turning to the figure nearest to him.

A chorus of assent answered him, and several old men, stepping forward, entered into a long narration of the pitiful facts of the case. It appeared that the man had been behindhand with the rent, and that Peter Dougall, without ceremony, had issued judgment, levelled the house, and taken possession of the croft, to secure compensation. He had offered the man and his family an ‘assisted’ passage to Canada, the

Government form for which the man now held in his hand.

Arranmore listened quietly while the facts of the case were explained to him.

‘Very well,’ he said, ‘I will inquire into it, and speak to Mr. Dougall on the subject.’

At the mention of Dougall’s name there was a general groan. Several other forlorn creatures then presented themselves, and told volubly of similar misfortunes.

Tired at last of their complaints, and feeling the impossibility of comprehending them properly off-hand, Arranmore bade the crowd a general adieu, and walked back into the castle.

For a long time the people gathered in knots, gazing vacantly at the castle-door; finally they dispersed in all directions, the

evicted tenants disappearing last, with many a shake of the head and muttered groan.

The very next day Peter Dougall himself arrived at the castle, anxious to pay his duty to the young laird, whom he now met for the first time in his new character. Arranmore at that juncture was glad of any occupation which would distract his mind, so he at once demanded from the factor a full account of his stewardship. For several days they were busy together, both indoors and out among the mountains. At last matters were made quite clear, and Arranmore expressed himself to the factor with his usual candour.

‘I am not a sentimentalist, Mr. Dougall, but it seems to me that, in more than one instance, you have behaved with unneces-

sary severity. I have my own theories as a landed proprietor, and I do not wish to depopulate the county.'

The factor's face turned livid ; for some moments he could not utter a word.

'My lord,' he exclaimed at last, 'I have been working for your lordship's goot.'

'I have no doubt of it,' said Arranmore, dryly, 'and I will do you the justice to admit that no one could have squeezed so large a sum out of so wretched a tenantry. You have literally skinned the flints, Mr. Dougall, and I—well, yes, I suppose I have been the gainer.'

'The land is goot land,' cried Dougall, 'and I have slaved to get it in goot order, and to raise the rents ! Does your lordship blame me for working day and night for your lordship's goot ?'

‘Not at all,’ answered Arranmore ; ‘ only, to be quite frank, I don’t think I have a right—a moral right, I mean—to draw one penny from such a place.’

‘Not draw a penny!’ gasped Dougall. ‘My life and soul!’

‘Let me make myself clear. These estates, from which I derive my title, consist two-thirds of stone and sand, not to count the water, which seems tolerably abundant! It is a wilderness still, quite as much a wilderness as the backwoods of Texas, or the plains of Manitoba. Here and there a few poor devils have, by incessant toil, managed to turn mud, and stone, and water into crofts of decent ground, where oats and potatoes manage to grow ; by which means and by pasturing their wretched sheep and cattle in the open

heather, they contrive to feed and live. Just as they contrive to keep body and soul together, you and I step in, like cormorants, and demand our moiety of what they are going to eat and drink—nay, in some cases, we demand all; for what remains to the tenant when the only stack of oats and the last cow have both to be sold in order to pay the rent?’

The factor saw here a loophole for his favourite argument.

‘Just so, my lord,’ he said; ‘the folk are no able to cultivate the land, and therefore it should be aal doon in sheep.’

‘And the people all expatriated, Mr. Dougall?’

‘It is for their ain goot!’

‘They don’t seem to think so. Well, we will talk the matter over again; but at

present I feel rather ashamed of my position. If I were a rich man, I should at once refuse to draw any monies from the estates for some time, and endeavour to assist the tenants, directly and indirectly, to recover the waste. We must solve the difficulty somehow and at once. On one point I am resolved—not to evict another tenant, unless it is clear to my mind that he is evading payment and presuming on my generosity. As to the tenants already evicted, I shall go into their cases *seriatim*, and doubtless the majority will be restored.'

Words would fail to paint the righteous wrath of the factor, as the reformatory designs of his master were then made plainly manifest. His first impulse was to stand upon his dignity, and incontinently to

throw up his situation. Being a cautious and a far-seeing man, however, he determined to sleep on it. So he met his employer's remarks with a surly acquiescence, and with characteristic self-command kept his righteous anger to himself.

But Mr. Peter Dougall was one of those men who cannot understand the action of ordinary conscience, and who, whenever anything interferes with their designs, at once conclude that some one else has been designing against them. It was now quite clear to his mind that his lordship's mind had been poisoned against him. By whom? That question, in his opinion, was easily answered. His old arch-enemy, the minister of Uribol, was at the bottom of it all.

In his heart perhaps Lord Arranmore cared little about the tenantry. He had described himself correctly enough when he had said that he was not a sentimentalist, if by that word he simply meant a person penetrated with the enthusiasm of humanity.

He was unaccustomed to vulgar suffering, and only understood it when associated with such picturesque griefs as appealed to his æsthetic sense. But he hated injustice in any form, and he was quite ready to redress any grievance which was fairly brought under his notice. The wrong done by Peter Dougall was unmistakable, and the young lord had too restive a conscience to acquiesce in it.

It was nevertheless a serious difficulty to him. The rent-roll of Coreveolan and

Uribol was terribly small already, for, though the acreage was enormous, the greater part of the ground was open heather and watery bog. If he sided with the tenants against his own factor, the rent-roll would dwindle down to little or nothing.

‘A political economist would settle the question in a moment,’ he said gloomily. ‘A poor man, a man without sleeping capital, has no right to be a landed proprietor. I ought to have either more money, or to sell the estate.’

Then came back on his mind in full force the remembrance of his engagement to his cousin Ethel.

Possessed of her fortune he might become a benefactor to his tenants, and an example to all the small landed

proprietors of Scotland. He had but to say the word and the marriage might be brought about almost at once ; indeed, it was almost inevitable that he should take some steps in the matter whether he wished it or not.

But the more he saw the expediency of carrying out his engagement, the more he felt the hopelessness of following the idle stream of his own personal wishes, so much the more did he cling to his passion for Mina Macdonald.

‘Why was I born a beggarly lord?’ he exclaimed to himself again and again. ‘Why did my parents label me “Aristocrat,” and give me no money to keep up the farce? If I were only the poor travelling student I once represented myself to be! If I were only her equal, though poor as a

church mouse ! Ah, those pleasant days,
that golden time, before she found me
out ! When shall I be as happy
again ?





CHAPTER XI.

A LOVE-STORM.

THE divine spark grows rapidly into full fire when it falls upon thoroughly combustible material.

At the end of a week's time Graham Macdonald was passionately in love with Ethel Sedley.

They met often, and the young aristocrat, by wicked art, rendered the young Highlander quite blind to the true relation between them. She watched his passion

grow, she fanned it carefully to flame ; by a thousand arts and coquetries she took care that it should not die out for a single moment. And there can be no doubt that she herself shared, perhaps for the first time in her life, the excitement of the tempest she aroused.

She was like one that walks very close to the edge of a perilous sea, and sings in safety, drinking the salt spray in strange rapture, though the ground is rocking underneath.

It was something, at least, to feel that she was loved by a man ; not by any of the dolls of the drawing-room, not by one of the pets of the *parterre*. It was delicious, in fairy-like triumph, to make the strong creature whom she had bewitched move to and fro at the bidding of her fitful will.

Once or twice she paused and asked herself :

‘ Am I going too far ? Shall I be able to retreat ?’

And she answered herself with the sophism that she had never, in open speech, encouraged the young man’s passion. Warm words were nothing, burning looks were nothing ; nor soft pressures of the hand, nor all the countless tendernesses wherewith a woman leads captive the troubled spirit of a lover.

Yes, she could easily withdraw ; she would soon, indeed, be far away from the Macdonalds and from Uribol. There was no harm, therefore, in amusing herself a little while she stayed.

Had she possessed a complete insight into Graham’s nature, she would have trembled

at the spirit she was invoking thence. She understood it about as little as she understood the wild scenery—the melancholy hills, the trackless wastes, the dark lagoons—of that sea-surrounded and lonely land. She admired Graham's glowing and emotional moods, during which his manly beauty seemed to shine in full perfection, just as she admired a sudden rainbow in the glens or a scarf of purple sunset fading over the Atlantic. She comprehended neither—neither the sad, solemn landscape, nor the potent spirit of the man.

And, indeed, Graham as yet scarcely comprehended himself. He seemed just coming to life under the warmth of her rosy touch. He went to and fro like one in a dream—dark when he was waiting for her approach or hastening to meet her,

bright when she was shining at his side.

They had no set appointments—that would have been too compromising from the lady's point of view—but they were always (as the delicious Irish bull expresses it) 'meeting accidentally on purpose.' And every time they met the spell of her influence upon him became intense, till it was almost more than he could bear.

At last, as lovers will, he encroached. Mad with admiration, he seized her in his arms and kissed her. She turned on him like a tigress.

'How dare you!' she cried, panting. 'I will never speak to you again.'

He stood shame-stricken, unable to defend himself, and, taking his silence for weakness, she stabbed him to the quick.

‘ A *gentleman* would not have done that. If we were equals——’

She paused, looking him from head to foot in scorn. He was astonished, for she had never before appeared to him in colours so unamiable. Before he could utter another word she left him, and he was too thunder-struck to follow.

He returned home to the manse, looking dark as death, and wretched as rain on the sea.

It was now Mina’s turn to remonstrate with her brother. She knew of those frequent meetings, and, though at first she attributed them to accident, she soon saw how the wind blew. So that night, as she sat with her brother alone in the house, their uncle being away on a sick call, she spoke out boldly :

‘Graham, what is wrong with you? What makes you seem so strange?’

He did not reply, but sat looking at the fire in moody silence. She arose, bent over him, and kissed him. The kiss spoke more than words, and, looking up startled, he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

‘What ails *you*, Mina?’

‘I cannot bear to see you so unhappy.’

‘But I am not unhappy.’

‘Oh, Graham,’ she cried, sobbing outright, ‘since these people came to Uribol we have had no rest nor peace. First *he* came here and put me to shame; now there is more sorrow coming, for *she* is bringing trouble to *you*!’

‘Whom do you mean?’

‘That lady—Miss Sedley. Oh, Graham, are you mad? Why do you think of her—

meet with her? She is a great lady, and she is to be Lady Arranmore.'

Graham's brow darkened, and his strong frame shook.

'You are talking nonsense,' he said. 'Miss Sedley is nothing to me.'

'But you meet her nearly every day.'

'Sometimes—by chance.'

'It is more than chance, Graham. She is an idle lady, and she is making a fool of you to fill up her time. If you are wise you will not go near her any more. Promise me you won't—Graham, promise! Graham, she will break your heart, as she has tried to break mine!'

But Graham was not just then in the mood either to invite confidence, or accept a warning. His soul was full of a wild dread that he had given mortal offence, and

that Ethel would carry out her threat and hold no further communication with him. So he left Mina sobbing by the fire, and went out-of-doors into the darkness of the chill moonless night, and he paced about for hours, like a wild beast, on the open fields above the shore. The fire of the kiss which he had taken, forcibly as it were, was still burning upon his lips ; his eyes were still full of her loveliness, as he saw it last in the full glow of a splendid scorn. The fury—for with such men love is a fury indeed—had him by the hair. With strange cries and wild gestures he rushed hither and thither, till the lights in the clachan went out one by one, and all the place lay dead-still in the black shadow of the hills.

Two days of torture passed, and at last he encountered the lady of his pain again.

She was sitting quite alone, on the place where he had often met her, close to the banks of Loch Drummdu. On her knees she held a book, and was reading—or pretending to read—as he appeared. He passed by at a little distance, with burning cheeks and averted head. He was nearly gone when she called to him, quite innocently and cheerfully, as if nothing whatever had occurred.

‘Mr. Graham!’

He turned and approached her hastily.

‘Papa is out on the lake fishing, and I am waiting for him here. It looks very black—do you think it is going to rain?’

There was nothing in the look or the tone to indicate that she had ever taken enough interest in him to be angry! She scarcely seemed to look up, being half occupied with

her book ; though all the while she was stealing furtive glances at his face.

He stood puzzled and distraught, and stammered something to the effect that the day would continue fine. Then, lifting his hat, he turned to go. But she called him back.

‘ Stop, please.’

He turned again, only too eager to remain, yet ashamed of his own delight.

‘ Mr. Graham, I have to ask your pardon.’

The tone was soft beyond measure, the voice tremulous, as if with the weight of tender emotion.

She did not look up, but kept her eyes upon her book.

‘ My—pardon !’

‘ Yes. When we last met I was

rude and ill-tempered. Will you forgive me ?'

Forgive her ! Oh, how willingly would he have laid his life down that moment for one such smile as that ! His eyes were dim for a moment, and he trembled ; then with a pathos of gesture that would have touched the heart of a fonder woman, he stretched out both his hands towards her and stood so, enraptured at her presence.

'We were both foolish,' she continued, smiling still more brightly. 'I am glad that we have met again, especially as I am so soon going away.'

'Going away !' he cried, finding his voice at last. 'Back to England ?'

'First back to Castle Coreveolan, and *then* to England.'

'When do you go ?'

‘To the castle? Oh, at the end of the week.’

‘I am sorry—I mean I—how long shall you stop there?’

‘That is uncertain. Perhaps until I get married.’

Another stab, most dexterously and cruelly given. Graham tottered under it, went white as death, and then, recovering himself, turned again to go.

‘Good-bye,’ he cried, and his voice was quite choked and broken.

‘Don’t go yet,’ she pleaded, with sudden earnestness. ‘Mr. Graham, I fear you are angry with me. I thought I possessed a little of your—your esteem?’

‘What is past is past,’ he groaned. ‘Do not speak of it!’

‘But I must, because you still remember!’

‘What?’

‘Oh, nothing,’ she cried, as if deeply mortified. ‘Go, if you *must*.’

With the same pathetic gesture of outstretched arms he turned to her again, and gazed at her with burning eyes.

‘Do you wish me to stay?’

‘Not at all, since you are so revengeful.’

‘Revengeful? O God!’

‘Can we not meet as friends?’ she asked, with a peculiar accent on the last word.

‘No!—never!’

‘Then it’s really a pity that we ever met at all.’

‘Amen to that!’ he said solemnly, so solemnly that she was amused, and cried, with a trill of silvery laughter, ‘Thank you!’ The laughter seemed to sting him into speech; at all events he found his

voice, and coming closer, stood looking down, in the full strength of his manhood, and the full force of his passion.

‘Yes, it is a pity that we ever met! I did not seek you—I tried to avoid you; but you came my way, and it was done. You taught me to care for you, to—to love you; and now you laugh at me, and would throw me away like a book you have read to the last page. Well, go! I may be your match yet, and the match of the man you are going to marry.’

Something in this tirade roused the girl’s hasty spirit; she rose, looked up at him haughtily, and shrugged her shoulders.

‘Since you crossed my path, sir, I had to be civil to you!’

‘Yet you knew we were not equals.’

‘Certainly!’—this with unmistakable emphasis.

‘And that you were engaged to another man?’

‘Excuse me, to a gentleman—Lord Arranmore. Was that any reason to prevent my amusing myself?’

‘Amusing yourself?’ returned Graham with a harsh laugh, but with no laughter in his fierce, angry, determined eyes. ‘So that is what you call it? If you had a drop of kindness in your heart you would not act so. Thank God my sister is not like you? Oh, you may smile, but she would blush to do as you have done!’

‘I’m not so sure,’ answered Ethel, flip-
pantly; ‘you forget she tried to inveigle
my intended husband.’

‘No!’

‘Lawrance—I mean, Lord Arranmore—has good taste, and your sister is rather pretty. Still, I think he might have looked a little higher. But there, what am I saying? If we go on like this we shall quarrel again, and I should be so sorry to quarrel, just as we are going to say good-bye.’

Then this was to be the end of it all. Those glowing looks, those sympathetic words, those stolen meetings, all meant nothing, and she was about to pass out of his life for ever, like a star sinking, like a summer vision fading away. And there she stood, calm and little moved, not so much stirred as if her little finger ached, or as if she were saying farewell to a stranger whom she had met in travel at some caravansary or roadside inn. He looked at her in the

stupefaction of utter despair. He seemed to have known her for a long, long time, yet their intimacy dated only a few days back. He had lived a lifetime in those quick, short hours. Oh, if she would *only* stay! If she would only let *him* be her slave, her dog, anything that might look up at her, *and* worship her, bear her cruelty, and crave now and then for a caress. Now for the first time he realised how far apart they were from each other.

‘But is it true? Tell me, for God’s sake—are you going to marry Lord Arranmore?’

‘Yes.’

‘You shall *not*!’

It came from his lips like a cry in spite of himself. His face was livid, his hands were desperately clenched.

‘I cannot bear it,’ he continued; ‘it will kill me—or, what is worse, I shall kill you both!’

‘Do you mean that for a threat?’

‘God help me! no. But I am not master of myself. See how I shake! and my brain is on fire! Do you not know I love you? Do you not know I would die for you? Ask me anything—bid me do what you please—I will do it though it costs me my life. Only do not leave me—do not go away!—at least not yet—not yet!’

He was quite unmanned now, and his eyes were blind with tears.

Touched by his sorrow, and a little startled to find that things had gone so far, she said softly:

‘Mr. Graham, I am so sorry! A little

while ago I was angry, but I am not angry now. You must try to forget me.'

'I shall never do that,' he answered, 'never—never!'

'I did not think—indeed I did not—you cared for me so much.'

'Now you know it,' he answered quickly, 'have pity—do not leave me!'

'But you forget—I am engaged to another person; and if I were not, it would be quite, quite hopeless.'

'Why?'

'Do not force me to pain you by further explanations,' she said. 'It is out of the question.'

He looked at her darkly beneath his brows, while his lips trembled, and his voice sobbed in his throat.

'I am a gentleman by birth. My fore-

bears were the lairds of all these isles, and there is no stain upon our name.' There is not a man or woman in the land but honours our blood more than the blood of the Arranmores.'

She shook her head sadly ; then, holding out her hand :

' Good-bye.'

He took her hand and held it between both of his, and as he did so she felt the strong heart-beats shaking his frame. She was grieved now that she had encouraged him, for she saw at last how deep and terrible his love had grown. Nor was her grief unmixed with fear. There was something in his passion, in his violence and over-mastering exaltation, which almost terrified her. He took everything so seriously, with such terrible earnestness, and

until she was far away out of his sight and reach there was no knowing what he might do.

As he stood clasping her hand and bending over her, the boat in which her father was fishing appeared out in the lake, rowed by two men, and approaching slowly. Sir Charles was standing up in the stern, fishing-rod in hand, and casting right and left wherever the dark cat's-paw of the wind ruffled the smooth surface of the water. The fish were on the feed, and at nearly every cast he hooked a small red trout and drew it in.

'Do go away now,' she cried; 'papa will see you!'

Sir Charles, however, was too intent on his amusement to notice anything else. Graham still retained her hand in his strong

hold, and looked with strange intensity into her face.

‘ You have made me love you,’ he said ;
‘ we cannot part like this.’

‘ Release my hand, sir—you hurt me !’

‘ Not until you promise to meet me again.’

‘ I will promise nothing ; *perhaps* we may meet.’

‘ I do not wish to offend you—I would rather suffer any pain than do that again—but let me kiss your hand.’

‘ If you wish to,’ she said, with a nervous laugh, ‘ I have not the power to prevent you ;’ and so saying, with the cunning of her sex, she placed herself with her back to the lake, so that the action could not be perceived by the party in the boat.

There was a glove on the hand, but it

was loose, and did not reach far up the wrist. Raising the hand, he pressed his lips, not on the glove, but on the warm skin of the wrist itself. It was a long, burning kiss, and his mouth seemed to cling to the sweet flesh. As she looked up flushing and trembling, she saw the hot tears chasing each other down his cheeks.

Softly but firmly she drew her hand away.

He did not detain it, but without another word turned to go.

‘Good-bye,’ she cried; and he answered ‘Good-bye’ in a broken voice.

Then he moved silently away.

She remained watching him until his figure disappeared far down the hillside. Then she raised her arm and looked critically at her wrist, where his kiss had left a soft crimson mark. She smiled, well pleased,

and raising the spot to her own lips, kissed it cordially.

‘He is a dear, brave fellow,’ she said to herself; ‘but I wish he did not like me quite so much. Well, it is nice, after all, to be loved like that! I’m sure I don’t know what will come of it. One thing is certain—I only meant to amuse myself with a storm in a teacup, and instead I have raised a *real* hurricane!’





CHAPTER XII.

A MEETING AND A PARTING.

AT the very moment that the interview described in our last chapter was taking place, another scene of a not dissimilar description was being enacted a few miles distant.

On a green lawn not far away from Koll Nicholson's hut, stood Lord Arranmore in close converse with Mina Macdonald. He had come upon her almost by accident, as she was slowly returning towards the manse,

and before either could avoid the other they were face to face.

Lord Arranmore's presence in the immediate neighbourhood was easily accounted for. Instead of crossing the mountains to Glenheather Lodge, a distance of nearly ten miles, he had sailed round by water in the *Jenny*, and had cast anchor in one of the numerous safe creeks to be found in Loch Uribol.

The creek he chose was near to Koll's lonely cabin, so he had scarcely landed, with the purpose of walking leisurely up to the lodge, when he saw the familiar figure close at hand.

While far removed from her personal presence he had been able, to a certain extent, to conquer his violent passion for her, but the moment he beheld her again the old

paused again, with a certain anger in her eyes.

‘Why do you follow me?’ she said.

‘Because I must speak to you, Mina! Why torture me so cruelly for that past fault? You do not know the world or the women in it. If you did, you would understand why I loved to linger unknown, unsuspected, with you for a companion, in this lonely spot where you dwell.’

‘I am not blaming you,’ she replied; ‘only, after what has passed, it is better that we should not meet.’

‘Why so?’

‘We are not equals, my lord.’

‘That is true,’ he cried warmly, ‘for you are as far my superior as a flower is superior to a stone. I can’t help my title, can I? If that is to be used as a bugbear

to frighten off the people I like best, I shall soon be without a friend in the world.'

The words were spoken winningly, with something of the old frank manner which at first fascinated her, and in spite of her firm resolution they thrilled her through. Scarcely conscious of their growing spell upon her, she slackened her pace, and listened, as he continued in the same tone.

'I don't think you quite understand me in this matter. I came from a society of which I was sick into these wilds, seeking for solitude and peace; all I wanted was to be let alone, to forget for a time the existence of the fashionable world; and I came *incog.* because I knew, by precious experience, how seldom even honest people show

their best side to a lord. By an accident I encountered you—that is to say, you were good enough to save my life. In return I learned to love you. I forgot the world, I forgot my friends, I forgot my miserable title—how could I remember these wretched earthly things when alone with Heaven and you? Well, you know how the world found me. I woke up from my dream, and since then I have never had a single moment's peace.'

There was no need for him to forcibly detain Mina now ; the fatal fascination was upon her, and she felt she could not leave him.

The first tones of his voice—so earnest, so loving, so true—restored in a moment her old faith and trust. But at that moment the memory of the words

which the baronet had uttered came back to her and stung her to the quick.

‘My lord,’ she said quietly, ‘such deeds as you have done do not lead to happiness or peace. You came to us with a falsehood on your lips—you came to me as an equal; and I listened to you, and believed you, and thought you true.’

‘What did I hide from you? Only my name.’

‘Was that all? You told me that you cared for me, and all the time you knew that your heart was already given away. May God forgive you, my lord, for your unkindness to me and mine!’

‘Mina, you do not understand.’

‘Indeed, my lord, I understand o’er well.’

‘By Heaven, you do not, or you would not wrong me so cruelly by telling me that

I have been false to you! When I said I loved you I spoke the truth; and now, Mina, my heart is still unchanged. Yes, it is you I love—not her who came between our lives that day.'

He paused, and there was silence. Mina could not speak; her heart was bounding fitfully; her brain was on fire; for she thought, 'Oh that he would speak like that for ever, and that I might listen! He loves me—oh yes, I am sure he loves me!'

'Mina.'

'My lord,' she answered softly.

He came to her with outstretched hands; she offered no resistance. He took her hand in his—he drew her to his side—he raised her face, and, stooping, kissed her brow.

'Mina,' he said softly, 'call me Lawrance;

say that I am happy and forgiven ; tell me that you trust me !

Her face grew pale as death ; she gently withdrew from his embrace.

‘ My lord,’ she said, ‘ you have no right to talk like that to me, and I have no right to listen. You forget your cousin’s claim.’

‘ No, Mina, I do not forget ; it is the thought of that which has kept me from your side, when I should have been by to help and comfort you.’

‘ And yet, minding that, you come to me again.’

‘ Even so, Mina. I love you—I do not love my cousin ; I will not marry where I cannot love.’

‘ And you would renounce your cousin—and—and——’

‘ And marry *you* !’

‘ Marry *me* !’ she repeated. ‘ Oh, my lord, do not talk so, even in jest.’

‘ Before God, I am not jesting ! Mina—tell me—will you be my wife ?’

He asked the words earnestly, quickly, and as he did so Mina felt her love for him increase tenfold. All the shame and degradation which she had felt, faded away before the bright beams of love which shone upon her now. He was not false—he had not lied to her—he had not made her a plaything to pass a few idle hours. No ; he had given her all his love—such love as man gives but once in a lifetime—and now he was there to lay wealth, honour, title—all at her feet ! Oh, if she could but answer him—if she could only throw her arms around his neck to say, ‘ Lawrance, I love you !’

But Mina quietly hung her head, and said :

‘ No, it cannot be !’

‘ Mina, do you mean that you refuse to become my wife ?’

‘ Yes, my lord, I refuse. Even were you free, you would not do right to look so low as I. As your lady, I should be despised by all the world. Your folk would scorn me as they do now ; and perhaps, in the end, you would despise me too. But as you are bound——’

‘ I tell you I am not bound. Mina, do you want to drive me mad ?’

‘ No, my lord—neither do I want to drive you to dishonour. You have given your faith to your cousin, and you must keep it.’

‘ You tell me *that*? Then, indeed, you

do not love me ! Mina,' he continued, as she silently hung her head, 'there was a time when I thought those grey eyes looked up into mine with a wealth of affection which any man might be proud of. If that was so—if you love me still—recall what you said, and give me your little hand. *You* have no bonds to break, and before such love as I feel for you no barrier will stand.

Again he paused and stretched forth his hands ; but Mina did not stir—neither did she utter a word. He looked into her face ; it was as white as death, but the mouth was fixed, and the eyes were tearless.

'No word, no sign,' he said bitterly ; 'then it would have been better—far better—if we had never met.'

He turned, and seemed about to leave

her. Should she let him go—without a word, a look, a sign—believing, as he did, that she had no love for him? She knew it would be better, and she tried to let him go.

She bit her lip until bright blood began to issue from the soft skin. She clenched her hands convulsively, but she stood perfectly silent, as she watched him move away, and as he went her aching eyes grew dim.

The scene all around her began to fade, as his figure was fading.

Unable longer to bear the agony of her heart, she stretched forth her hands, and, sobbing, named his name.

In a moment he was beside her. Folding her in his arms, he laid her head upon his breast.

‘ You love me, Mina ? ’ he whispered softly.
‘ You will not send me away ? ’

Mina gently withdrew from his embrace and put her hand in his.

‘ My lord, ’ she said quietly, ‘ it is because I care for you that I think it is better for us to say good-bye. It is hard enough for me to say, God knows ; you should not make it harder by any words of yours ; but, believe me, it will be better for us never to meet again. You must try to forget what I have said to you. ’ She continued quietly : ‘ If you have any regard for me, my lord, you will remember me only as a humble friend. ’

She spoke in hesitation, mingled with strange fear. Now that the confession was made, she felt half ashamed, half frightened at what she had done.

Lawrance, too, felt shame, but only for himself. Mina had reminded him of his duty, and in thus reminding him she had shown to him in its true light the kind of act which he had longed to do.

He knew that he was bound to his cousin Ethel almost as strongly as if she were his wife; he knew also that if he were to break that bond, and bring upon himself the contempt and hatred of all honest men, he would soon grow to despise himself; and yet he felt that he would brave dishonour, run the risk of despising himself, if by that risk he won Mina.

Again he spoke to her, again with lips, and eyes, and outstretched arms he pleaded his cause.

But Mina was now firm; she did not look at him. His words almost broke her

heart, but the thought of Ethel Sedley kept her strong.

‘God knows,’ she said to herself, ‘it breaks my heart to leave him, knowing that I have his love ; but it would be bitterer still to see his love turn into hatred, to see him learn to despise me for leading him into wrong.’

She was not sorry that she had told him of her devotion ; she did not feel shame now : and when she left him she held up her face for him to kiss her, believing that it was for the last time.

Having once said good-bye she feared to linger, so she passed quickly across the hill, and soon regained her home.

On the threshold of the manse she met Graham.

He had just come from Ethel Sedley’s

side. His face was as pale as Mina's, his manner was agitated, but he did not seem inclined to talk, and she was only too glad to escape.

She had noted his pale face, but she did not think of the cause—her mind was too full of her own great trouble.





CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOWS IN THE MANSE.

MINA said she had a headache that night, and could not come down to go through her usual two hours of study ; so the clergyman wandered aimlessly about until bed-time, while Kirsty, well supplied with restoratives, worried Mina for fully an hour. The house seemed very strange that night ; it was the first time for many years that Mina had not been at her post—the first time since

her childhood that illness had confined her to her room. The old clergyman was very anxious, although assured by Kirsty that the illness was nothing more than feverishness caused by over-fatigue. He tried to settle to his studies, but could not, for he seemed to be listening for the voice of his pet pupil; and, after one or two ineffectual attempts to concentrate his thoughts, he threw his books aside.

And Mina, putting aside each remedy which was brought to her, begged again and again for peace.

‘If you will only leave me, Kirsty,’ she said, ‘and look after my uncle and brother, I will try to be all well again to-morrow.’ Then, seeing a pained look of reproach come into the woman’s eyes, she stretched forth her arms and burst into passionate

tears. 'Oh, Kirsty,' she said, 'I know I am cross and stupid, but do not be angry with me to-night !'

And the woman, in answer to that pitiful appeal, folded the sobbing girl in her arms and laid her aching head upon her bosom, and cried too. For a time they remained so, Mina drawing comfort from the kindly arms which were folded around her—from the lips which were now and again pressed upon her burning forehead; and when at length the woman left her, her troubled soul seemed more at peace.

That night Mina slept; for Kirsty, imagining that the illness was the result of fatigue, had given her a sleeping-draught which Doctor John had left behind him on his last visit to the manse. The draught was so strong a one that, although Mina's

brain was excited and seriously troubled, it soothed her, and kept her in a deep sleep during the weary hours of night. When she awakened in the morning, however, and unconsciously raised her hand to her forehead, she felt that it was burning feverishly; her heart was as heavy as lead. She thought it must be late, for she heard people stirring in the room below, but she did not attempt to move. Her eyes were fixed upon the curtained window, and she felt that tears were stealing slowly down her cheeks.

Presently she heard Kirsty's step coming up the stairs, and she hastily dried her eyes, and, leaving her bed, proceeded to dress herself for the day. When she stood before the glass she started back in utter amazement. How deathly-white her face was!

how dark and heavy-looking her eyes! She seemed like the shadow of her former self, and yet scarcely twenty-four hours had passed since she parted with her lover.

With a rush of memory all that scene came back to her, as she sat down before the window and gazed out at the hills in sickening despair. She thought of his words and her own—she thought of that one last look which he had given her as she turned her face towards her home. He had been willing to sacrifice all for her sake—to break every tie which bound him—and endow her, despite the opinion of the world, with his own name! Yes, he had offered her happiness—such happiness as she felt it would never be her lot to meet again—and she had voluntarily cast all these 'gifts away; and now what remained

for her? The sunlight of her life had passed away, and left her very cold and weary—lonelier than the loneliest hill which pointed to the ever-darkening sky.

How dreary it all seemed to her now—the bay which had once held the *Jenny*, the hills where she had so often walked with the stranger whom she had gradually learned to love, all these things had passed away as he had done, and left her with a dreary life before her, and a heart as cold and heavy as a stone.

She dreaded to go down lest her pale cheeks and weary eyes should reveal her secret to her brother, but her uncle had sent twice for her, and she had to go.

She was glad to find, when at length she did go down, that Graham was not at home, and that her uncle was deep in the columns

of the paper which had arrived by post that morning. He put it aside, however, as soon as she appeared, and looked anxiously into her pale face, and kissed her very fondly.

‘Mina, my bairn,’ he said, ‘you have been studying o’er closely, and getting too little of the caller air. I have decided that we will lay aside our books for a few days, until you are quite strong again.’

In this Mina acquiesced readily enough, and then induced her uncle to return to his paper. She did not want any comments on her pale cheeks, nor any reference made to the past.

The manse seemed drearier than ever that day, and Mina felt that she could not rest at home. After breakfast she stole from the house, and, hastening down to the shore,

pushed out her boat, and rowed herself along the coast to Koll Nicholson's hut. The old man was at home. During the night he had been out with the herring-fishers, but now his smack was at anchor, his soaking clothes were stretched upon the beach to dry, and he himself was about to sit down to a meal of some of his own fish. When Mina entered the hut he invited her to take a seat and join in the repast.

For answer Mina put her arms round the old man's neck and kissed his cheek; and he, looking up, noted for the first time the worn, weary look on her face.

'What ails her bairn?' he asked anxiously, and Mina shook her head.

'Nothing, Koll, nothing,' she said, but the tell-tale tears would come to her eyes;

and, seeing his worn face grow still more anxious, she said :

‘ I could not sleep last night, so Kirsty gave me a sleeping-potion ; it has made me feel very strange to-day, Koll.’

He took her small white hand and smoothed it tenderly between his fingers ; the tears stood in his own wild eyes as he murmured :

‘ Her bairn mustna get sick—that would break Koll’s heart ; she must come oot on the salt sea—that is the best doctor of aal.’

Mina took a seat near the open door, and looked out upon the sea. It stretched calm and clear before her, its surface darkened by the chill shadows from the sky, its waves breaking with a low, monotonous sound upon the shore. She rested her cheek upon

her hand, and gazed wearily forth, while the old man watched her with anxious eyes. He plied her with questions, and Mina answered him for the most part in monosyllables, seldom turning to look at him, keeping her eyes fixed with strange intentness upon the water.

Presently Koll asked :

‘ What of the young laird, Mina ? Will you be seeing him again lately, my bairn ? ’

As he asked the question he looked at her even more intently than before, and he saw her shiver through and through. For a moment she did not answer him—her lip was trembling ; as soon as she could command her voice, she answered :

‘ Lord Arranmore is up at Coreveolan Castle with—with his friends.’

She did not answer the latter part of his

question, and, although he noticed the omission, he did not press the matter. As it was, the question had done its work—it showed him only too plainly that Mina had not cast altogether from her heart the memory of the man who had come amongst them as an equal, and so disturbed the peace of her home. He saw this, and his heart turned bitterer still within him. For a time he sat silently watching her; then she turned towards him a pale, sad, thoughtful face.

‘Koll,’ she said, ‘when I die I should like to be buried down here on the sand, close to the line where the tide comes up. I don’t think I should feel so lonely if I could only hear the sea.’

‘May God Almighty give her bairn long life!’ said the old man, solemnly.

‘What for should her bairn talk of deeing?’

The girl laughed hysterically; then, suddenly, her laughter ceased, and he saw that she was crying.

‘What ails her bairn?’ he asked again; and Mina, drying her eyes, answered petulantly:

‘Nothing—nothing. Do not watch me, Koll—go on with your work—or I shall go back to the manse and leave you!’

So the old man did as he was bidden. After clearing the breakfast-table he went outside to see to his nets, and left Mina alone in the hut. And all the time he worked his mind was troubled, and he murmured:

‘Tamn her!—tamn the witch! She is bringing trouble to her bairn!’

All that day Mina stayed with her foster-father, and in the evening she took her boat to row back to the manse. Koll wanted to accompany her. The strangeness of her manner caused him some apprehension, and he did not like to see her go forth alone. He pleaded earnestly for permission to go with her, but Mina was firm, and he had to let her go.

The daylight had almost faded away. The far-off hills were wrapped in black shadow, and a cold grey light played upon the sea. The tide was high, the surface of the water very calm, and nothing was heard but its low-sounding murmur upon the shore. For a time Mina rowed steadily, for she saw the tall figure of Koll Nicholson upon the shore watching her; but when the ever-thickening mists of night enveloped

him and hid him from her sight, she ceased rowing, and, bending forward to rest her body upon the oars, looked wearily around.

How quiet it was! If she could only close her eyes, she thought, and go to sleep with the sound of the sea in her ears, and the breath of heaven upon her cheek, she might find peace. And would it not be better so?—better than to live on with all her trouble and pain, with the knowledge of his love and her sacrifice to darken every day of her life. If she could only have died in his arms that day, with his lips upon hers, his eyes gazing down upon her, she thought God would have been good; but her way had not been His way—she was still left to suffer, and say, ‘Thy will be done!’

When she got home that night she tried

to go through her usual routine of lessons with her uncle, but ere the task was over she fairly broke down, and, on the advice of her uncle, went up to bed.

That very night, shortly after Mina had retired to rest, Doctor John called at the manse. He did not intend to stay there—he was on his way to a house two miles distant, and he had swerved a little from his road in order to inquire as to the welfare of the clergyman's household. On hearing that Mina was sick, he at once asked to be allowed to see her, and was shown up to her room. From what the clergyman had said, he had not been very apprehensive as to Mina's state, but when he saw her he became alarmed. She was much changed since he last had seen her—she was depressed and strange in her manner, and strong

feverish symptoms had begun to assert themselves. He stayed some time with her; when he came downstairs it was time for him to go.

‘The poor lass is far from weel,’ he said, as he shook the clergyman’s hand. ‘I am glad I happened to be passing by to-night. I have given her a draught—it is all I can do for her to-night; but I’ll come again, please God, to-morrow morning.’

With that he mounted his pony and trotted off.





CHAPTER XIV.

KOLL ON THE WATCH.

THERE was no rest for Koll Nicholson while his foster-child was sick. Passing out from the kitchen of the manse, he came out on the shore of the fjord. The wind was blowing a gale from the east, and, as the tide was running out, the water met the wind and roared into breaking waves. The shadow of coming winter was already on the land, and there was little light of either moon or stars.

Turning his face on the troubled sea, the man gazed at the light burning all night in the room where Mina lay; then, with a wild cry, he stretched out his arms towards it, while the salt tears coursed down his wrinkled cheek.

‘Star of my breast,’ he said, ‘bairn of the old man that had nae bairn of his own, may God, that made the mountains, and the sea, and the angels, and the teevils, keep you safe for Koll this night and for evermore! Dinna dee, my bonnie doo, dinna dee! There will be plenty of angels in heaven without ye, and the old man she will pe missing you and breaking her heart! Dinna, dinna dee!’

For a long time he stood watching the light, while it darkened ever and anon with shadows passing across the blind. At last,

as if some new thought had seized him, he uttered another low cry and left the shore. All was pitch-dark around and before him, but with the rapidity of a wild beast he began ascending the hills beyond the manse. Here the wind was shrieking, and a drizzly rain was beginning to fall; but, without hesitating for a moment, he kept upon his way, running rather than walking, and pausing at long intervals to utter low moans and fling up his hands.

Following the windings of the stream, and guiding himself partly by its sound, he ascended rapidly to the lonely shores of Loch Drummdhu.

Dark as it was, he could see the flashing of the sharp, white waves of the lake, beaten and lashed into storm by the angry wind. He paused on the shore, stretching out his

arms again, like a sorcerer invoking his familiar spirits, and, though his hair and beard were dripping with rain, and the wet mist was thickening all around him, he paid but little heed.

‘And it is the love-sickness that is killing her bairn,’ he cried, ‘and it is the wicked teevil’s limb of a Sassenach woman that is breaking her bairn’s heart. And it was a witch, a tanned witch, and Koll’s charm was nae goot, but she will try anither, and anither, and anither, till God tamns the witch, and her bairn marries the laird. Ochone, ochone!’

He rushed on again, as if the wind was blowing at his back, along the sides of the loch. Presently he paused in the very shadow of the hills, and saw, far before him, a light like that of a fixed star. No sooner

had he perceived it than he hastened on towards it. He knew it well. It came from the windows of the lonely shooting-lodge where Sir Charles Sedley and his daughter were still lingering, accompanied now by the young Lord of Arranmore.

The lodge lay right across the loneliest part of the mountain, full two miles away. There was no path—only a wild stretch of heather, with intervals of deep and dangerous bog. But with his eyes on the light Koll hastened on, sometimes stumbling and falling, but scarcely slackening in his eager speed. It seemed that some fierce fascination drew him that way.

Not until he was within two or three hundred yards of the house did he pause. A bright light was issuing from the window

of the sitting-room on the ground-floor, but the rest of the place was dark.

There was neither wall nor paling round the lodge—only the open heather—so, stooping down very low, Koll crept closer and closer. He saw now that the curtains were not drawn, and that the whole interior of the room was visible. Throwing himself upon his hands and knees, he crawled forward, and, when he was within a few yards of the window, raised his head cautiously and looked in.

On the table, which was covered with a crimson cloth, a bright lamp was burning, and by the light Sir Charley Sedley and his daughter were playing chess. In an arm-chair, drawn close to the bright turf fire which was burning on the hearth, sat Lord Arranmore, reading a book. There seemed

to be dead silence, but the baronet looked rather out of temper; while Ethel was regarding him with an amused smile. That smile would have faded quickly had she known with what intensity of blind hatred the wild eyes of Koll Nicholson were even then reading her face.

Let us use our Asmodean privilege, and enter the room, hearing the words which Koll, crouching on the heather, tries in vain to catch.

‘I think that is checkmate, papa. Move if you can!’

With knitted brow, Sir Charles scanned the pieces, made several irritated efforts to escape from his position, and then, throwing himself back in his chair, acknowledged himself beaten.

‘And now that I have beaten you two

games running, I think I'll go to bed.'

So saying Ethel rose and stood ready to retire, but glancing quietly at Arranmore, who remained quite intent on his book. With a slight shrug of the shoulders she walked over to the window and looked out.

'What a night!' she exclaimed. 'The rain is falling in torrents.'

'It always does rain here,' growled the baronet, 'more or less.'

'Generally more, papa. It's a depressing climate, and I'm really very tired of it. What a relief London will be, after so much damp weather and ill-temper!'

'Ah!' sighed Sir Charles, with a significant scowl at his nephew.

Passing quietly across the room, Ethel stooped over her father and kissed him.

‘ Good-night, papa !’ she said ; then added carelessly, reaching out her hand, ‘ Good-night, Lawrance !’

With a start, Arranmore rose and bent forward as if to kiss her cheek ; but she drew back quickly, and, turning her head away, quietly left the room. The young lord smiled in an awkward way, and again sank into his chair. There was a long silence, which was broken at last by Sir Charles.

‘ How long is this to go on ?’ he exclaimed. ‘ Upon my soul, Lawrance, I wonder at you !’

‘ What’s the matter ?’

‘ As a man, I am astonished at your conduct ; as a father, I am indignant. You are treating Ethel shamefully. If it were not for her great affection for you, and the

perfect sweetness of her disposition, she would resent your conduct as it deserves.'

Arranmore did not seem astonished at this sudden tirade; he had rather the manner of one who expected, and to some extent deserved it.

'My dear uncle, it's all right,' he said, with a yawn.

'It's not all right,' cried the baronet, crossing over to the hearth-rug and standing astride upon it in the full strength of his parental indignation. 'It's altogether wrong, and you know it.'

'What have I done?'

'Done? Your unkindness is breaking the poor child's heart. You do not treat her with even common cousinly affection.'

'She has never complained.'

'She is too high-spirited to do so. You

might kill her by inches and she would never complain. She's a Sedley, sir, and she knows how to take her punishment; but I'm not going to stand by and see it without a word of remonstrance. Come, let us understand each other. Do you want to break your engagement ?

The young man was silent.

'Have you no answer? You had better be frank with me. You ought to know as well as I do that this sort of thing can't go on for ever. How is it to end?'

'God knows!' cried Arranmore, with sudden earnestness; 'I'm sure I don't.'

'What do you mean? Are you mad?'

'I shall soon become so if you torture me with these questions. I am completely wretched, and you must see it. I wish to do my duty, to act honourably, but Ethel

is not the only person in the world to be considered.'

'I see!' returned the baronet with a sneer. 'You are still thinking of that Highland hussy whom you were running after when we discovered you. I dare say you have met her again. She has thrown herself in your way, and you are too weak to resist that sort of temptation.'

Leaning back in his chair, the young man now looked steadily and angrily at his companion.

'Uncle, take care! No one—not even you—shall say a word against Miss Macdonald in my presence.'

'Bah!'

'I mean what I say. For any unhappiness that has come of our meeting I alone have been to blame. I deceived her grossly,

but she has behaved throughout the whole affair with a nobility which puts me utterly to shame.'

'That's right, sing her praises. Shall I call Ethel back and let her hear?'

'Certainly not. If you think that I wish to cause any pain to Ethel, you do me cruel injustice. My sole desire is to see her happy.'

'And you show that desire by hankering after a peasant woman, her social inferior and yours.'

'Miss Macdonald is not a peasant woman, sir—she is a lady.'

'Nonsense!'

'I regard her as in every way my equal. Indeed, there is no person living whom I admire and honour more.'

'Lawrance, let there be an end to this

rubbish. Let me speak a few words to you as a man of the world.'

'Very well.'

'The whole matter is very simple. Strip it of the veil of rose-coloured romance which you throw over it, and look at it calmly, sir, with me. This young person, of whom you seem to entertain so high an opinion, lives in a different world to yours. You are not equals, and can never be more closely united than you are now; you are, therefore, doing her the greatest injury a human being could do. You know, as well as I know, that she could never, under any circumstances, become your *wife*. What character, then, would you assign to any close personal connection that might take place between you? Hear me out! You are not acting like a man of honour. You

are deceiving both yourself and her by a dream that will never be realised, and you are at the same time breaking a holy bond into which you have entered with one who is in every respect your equal.'

The young man listened to his speech with some impatience; then quietly rising to his feet at its conclusion, he said emphatically :

'Every word you say is founded on a misapprehension. I regard Miss Macdonald as also in every respect my equal.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that, were I a free man, were there not other ties which I am unwilling to break, I would offer her my hand to-morrow.'

'And make her Lady Arranmore?'

'And make her Lady Arranmore!'

Sir Charles positively gasped with astonishment and indignation. He gazed on his nephew as upon one just ripe for Bedlam. Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he opened the room door and peeped out into the lobby. Closing the door again, he faced his nephew.

‘Thank God Ethel did not hear that!’ he cried. ‘Very well, my lord. Break your engagement, insult my daughter by comparing her to a common country-girl. From this moment I wash my hands of you. I trusted you—loved you, I may say, like my own son. But there is an end to human patience, and you have exhausted mine.’

‘My dear uncle,’ said Arranmore, quietly, ‘you misunderstand me.’

‘No, no! I wish that were possible.’

‘I have no intention of breaking my engagement with Ethel!’

‘What!’

‘I merely say that I regarded Miss Macdonald as my equal, and that I should feel no shame in making her my wife. I did not say that I intended to marry her. Of course, that is out of the question, as I am already plighted to Ethel; but even if I were a free man I doubt if Miss Macdonald would accept my hand.’

The baronet breathed again. In his heart he regarded Arranmore’s feeling for Mina Macdonald as mere boyish infatuation, which would rapidly pass away; and he had set his heart on a match between the cousins. Knowing his nephew’s headstrong character, however, he dreaded what he might do under the impulse of the moment.

It was a relief to hear that he had no intention of breaking his engagement.

Sir Charles Sedley was not a sentimental man, and did not solicit, on behalf of his daughter, anything more than cool, matter-of-fact affection. Distrusting all unions built on the volcano of romantic passion, he felt quite certain that Lord Arranmore and Ethel would make a thoroughly suitable pair, while their marriage would consummate a long series of plans for the union and resuscitation of both families.

Before he parted from his nephew that night he accosted him in the old semi-paternal mood, and with tears in his eyes accorded him his full forgiveness.

‘Not a word of this to Ethel,’ he said, squeezing the young man’s hand. ‘The

poor child is so sensitive, and she would not understand. You know how she worships you, my boy. Thank heaven, you are still loyal to your first love; if she thought otherwise the shock would break her heart.'

Arranmore sighed heavily as he held his uncle's hand, then lit his bed-candle and went quietly upstairs, passing on his way the chamber where Ethel lay fast asleep and dreaming—not of him—but of Graham Macdonald.

As the lights went out in Glenheather Lodge, a tall figure stood in the wind and rain that surrounded it. Lying upon the ground, close under the partly-open window of the sitting-room, Koll Nicholson had heard a part of what had been spoken—had heard, but had understood incompletely,

owing to his want of familiarity with the English tongue. But the old man was wonderfully shrewd, and a few broken sentences were quite enough. Raising his height, he shook his fist at the darkened window of the lodge.

‘The teevil tamn you all,’ he cried, ‘that would turn the young laird’s heart against her bairn! Her bairn shall live—her bairn shall na dee! If the white witch were drooned in the salt sea, the laird would marry her bairn, and she would be the leddy of Arranmore.’

Muttering wildly to himself, he wandered away down the hillside in the direction of his hut, but later on he stood again beneath the lighted window of the sick-room in the manse.

All that night his eyes never closed.

His spirit was full of a wild trouble which nothing could appease, and it was well for Ethel Sedley's peace of mind that she did not know what dark thought was rising in his soul.





CHAPTER XV.

THE DEVIL'S BRIDGE.

ALL night long the rain fell in torrents, but the morning broke clear and cold, with bursts of brilliant sunshine. Soon after daybreak Doctor John, who was an early bird despite his convivial habits, appeared at the manse door, where he found Graham awaiting him, and, with a business-like nod, passed at once upstairs to the sick-chamber, where Janet was keeping watch. In about a quarter of an hour he re-emerged.

‘How is she?’ said Graham, as he entered the great kitchen.

‘The draught I gave her has done weel with her,’ said Doctor John. ‘The perspiration has relieved the natural humours of the body, and with the blessing of God she has slept sound.’

‘Is she in any danger? Is it the fever, I mean?’

‘It’s the fever surely; and yet it’s not the fever whatever. It’s her heart that’s preying on her, for all the world like a lintie thumping its life out in a cage. But leave her to God and Doctor John, and I believe she’ll come round.’

Here the old minister entered the kitchen, shook hands with the doctor, and, putting the same questions as Graham, received much the same answers.

‘I fear it is a chill the child has taken,’ he said, seating himself by the fire; ‘and, besides, she has been studying too much. I thought she was stronger.’

‘She’s strong enough in the body, but she’s the heart of a little fish, all flutter, and fondness, and fear. Has she had any mental trouble?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Mr. Macdonald, simply; while Graham looked upon the ground and said nothing.

‘Between you and me, it’s very like the love-sickness! I’ve seen it on men and maids, as well as cattle and pigs, and I knew an old man of seventy, once, in Bana, who had it sae bad in his back that he thought it was the lumbago. Ye may laugh, Mr. Graham, but I’m speaking as a medical practeetioner.’

‘Your diagnosis will not do in this case,’ said Mr. Macdonald, gravely. ‘Mina is not in love.’

‘Are you quite sure?’ returned the leech, slyly. ‘How could you tell the signs of it, since you never had the sickness yourself?’

Mr. Macdonald smiled, but thought a reply unnecessary. He was too well acquainted with Doctor John’s eccentricities to contradict or bandy words with him. Moreover, it just then occurred to him, almost for the first time, that there might be more truth in the doctor’s surmise than he exactly cared to admit. He remembered Mina’s brief acquaintance with Lord Arranmore, and the fascination which the young man had exercised over her life. Could it be possible that the discovery of his identity

had left a serious wound? Was she thinking of him still, though she knew their paths lay so far apart? The minister could not be positive in his answers to these questions, and his mind became seriously troubled.

'Keep her quiet, whatever,' said the doctor, 'and the fever will pass away. It's a distemper that all folks are subject to, for all the world like young puppies, and the strong ones are sure to pull through. But for most of these complaints there's but one cure, and it's to be found inside the kirk door.'

'What's that, Doctor John?' asked Graham, carelessly.

'What would it be but a gold wedding-ring!' cried the doctor. 'Slip it on her finger, and I'll warrant the fever will leave her in a day.'

‘I believe neither in your disease nor your remedy, doctor,’ said the minister, shaking his head quietly. ‘You’re a bachelor yourself, and no authority on the subject.’

‘And must a man be poisoned himsel’ to ken the use of streecknine or arsenicum? Can a pheesycian no diagnose hydrophoby unless he’s been bitten himsel’ by a mad dog? I’ve studied medicine, and I’ve studied marriage, and I’m familiar wi’ the signs o’ baith. Dinna tell me I’m a bachelor! I’m an M.D. o’ the great University of Aberdeen, and I havena practised thirty years in the Hielands on baith man and cattle without knowing the signs of aal diseases beneath the sun.’

To tell the truth, Doctor John was far less clever in this particular matter than he

pretended to be. Always of an inquisitive turn of mind, he had not failed to hear what common gossip said of the young Lord of Arranmore, and of his relations with the family at the manse. To make suspicion certainty, he had a little confidential talk with Koll Nicholson, who confided to him the whole truth, so far as he knew it.

This was quite enough for Doctor John, and when he found Mina suffering from all the symptoms of incipient brain fever, and ascertained that there was no exciting bodily cause to account for her indisposition, he at once arrived at the truth—that Mina's illness was mental rather than physical, and, in all probability, traceable to a disappointment in love.

Doctor John breakfasted at the manse, beguiling the time with many a quaint story

and dry jest; then he departed, promising to look in again in a couple of days. Had he been half as shrewd as he considered himself, especially in the diagnosis of what he called the 'love-sickness,' he certainly would have had his attention attracted by Graham Macdonald, who was moody and vacant to a degree, left his breakfast untouched, and altogether exhibited signs of a distempered and troubled soul. All this the doctor attributed to anxiety on Mina's behalf, without suspecting that Graham, much as he loved his sister and lamented her illness, had a wild sorrow of his own which he could with difficulty conceal.

After breakfast Graham went up to his sister's room, where Janet still kept unwearied watch. He found Mina lying quietly upon her pillow, her eyes open, her

cheeks burning with one bright, hectic spot. She knew him, and smiled as he kissed her ; but, remembering the doctor's injunctions, he would not let her speak. He alone of all the inmates of the manse knew the true extent and nature of her trouble.

Never had his heart yearned towards her in such utter sympathy of sorrow, for the same poison that she had tasted was even then burning in his own veins.

He spoke a few soothing words, and then, with his eyes full of tears, went on tiptoe away.

He had now a double reason for hating the very name of Arranmore.

Not only did he consider the young lord the sole responsible cause of his sister's illness, but he detested him beyond measure as being the betrothed lover of Ethel Sedley.

He had always disliked him, even when he knew nothing of his rank and title. Now he felt a furious yearning to be at his throat.

As he stole from the silent manse his hands were clenched, and his face was fiercely set. Had he encountered his rival at that time there might have been an ugly scene.

Something drew him up the mountains, past the scene of his frequent trysts. There were hurry and trouble in his heart, he did not know why, but his pace was slow.

He rambled along with head bent and brows knitted, scarcely looking to right or left.

The burn, in full spate after the heavy rain, and swollen to the size of a muddy

stream, roared past him on its way to the sea.

When he came to Loch Drummdhu he stood for a time gazing up its dark expanse to the silent mountains beyond.

Before he stirred again he went over, word by word, every conversation he had had with the woman he loved, and the thought of her proud beauty brought the blood to his brow, and filled his eyes with passionate light.

At last he wandered on—not homewards, but towards the hills. Following a footpath which wound along the edge of the solitary lake, he came among mountain shadows, and saw, a mile away to his left, the lonely shooting-lodge.

Was she there still? Should he see her? Should he walk nearer, in the hope of

meeting her? No; he would at least preserve the secret of their intimacy, and, if he did encounter her, it should be in solitude.

But not just then—another day. He felt he could scarcely bear to meet her that day—he was so wild and troubled with all that had taken place, and the face of his sick sister was following him still.

Instead of approaching the lodge, he set his face to the ascent which led to the mountains, and began, aimlessly enough, to climb upward.

His walk soon brought him to the banks of the Finnoch River, a wild mountain stream which fed Loch Drummdu. It came from another gloomy loch high up among the mountains, and it flowed through gorges so deep that they seemed rather the

fissures made by earthquake than the bed of a stream.

Scarcely a tree or shrub overhung its banks, save here and there a lovely rowan-tree swinging its red berries high above the whirling pools.

Coming on the rocky banks, he looked down and saw the river rushing past in full flood—black, terrible, and deep, flecked with white spittle of whirling foam. Here it slipped like a sheet of black glass through a pass so narrow that a mountain-deer might have leapt across; then it came to boiling falls, beneath which there spread pools which had never felt the sun, and dark, undiscovered channels tunnelling the solid rocks.

Graham knew every turn and bend of the river, for he had fished every pool, and

often, dipping his single fly dexterously in the deepest and most sunless holes, had hooked a huge fish—only, however, to lose it at the first rush.

No angler, however skilful, could have killed a salmon there.

He wandered on, pausing from time to time to watch the still rising waters.

He was in the mood to enjoy the fury of the flood, and he stood on every dizzy crag, listening to the thunder far beneath his feet. At last he came to the blackest and loneliest gorge of all, and saw hanging above him, in the dim shadow of the mountains, the desolate Devil's Bridge.

Around this gorge, for several hundred yards on either side, clustered a wood of mountain firs, the only trees for miles around. All were old trees, some huge and

tall, many quite withered and leafless, from the constant force of the mountain blast.

At the top of the gorge, where the crags leaned together, leaving a gap only some twelve feet broad, a rude bridge had been fashioned, partly by Nature, partly by the hand of man.

One great tree, partially uprooted, had fallen across the gap, two smaller trees had been placed by its side ; then planks had been nailed on these, on either side of the passage iron staples had been fastened in the rock, from these staples were stretched two thick hand-ropes, reaching about breast high to any person passing across. Underneath the bridge was a long, deep pool, now, in the time of flood, swollen and covered with foam.

Whoever had christened the bridge had chosen its name with more fitness than originality. A gloomier structure and a gloomier place could scarcely have been conceived. The black fir overshadowed the stream on every side, and the river beneath looked like some subterranean lava-stream sent from the innermost heart of hell.

Even with nature familiarity breeds contempt, and Graham Macdonald came up to the Devil's Bridge, and stood leaning in indolent indifference over the dark river, watching the dead leaves swirl down and the great foam-balls bubble and break.

The bridge rocked beneath his weight, but he had trodden it a hundred times, and he did not care.

Lost in thought he stood looking down. All at once, as he stood, he heard a voice

singing as if from the very air above his head. He started, for the tune seemed familiar, and the melody was one of those modern melodies of the Italian school which are the delight of drawing-rooms.

Yes, it was her voice, he knew it in an instant! Eager to behold her, he ran across the bridge, and, passing through the archways of trees, came out on the open mountain, where she was sitting deep in heather, freshly gathered ferns by her side, and a book in her lap.

She looked up as he came, and did not seem the least surprised.

'I thought you were not far away,' she said.

'Why?' he exclaimed, astonished.

'Because just before I came over the bridge I saw your familiar spirit.'

His face expressed such genuine perplexity that she continued :

‘ Don’t you know who I mean ? The grim old man whom I compared to one of Fingal’s giants.’

‘ Not Koll Nicholson ?’

‘ Yes, I think that’s the name. Pray, Mr. Graham, why have you instructed this disagreeable person to follow me about ?’

‘ I !’ gasped Graham, in still deeper wonder.

‘ This morning he came right up to the lodge window and stared in. I screamed and thought it was a ghost. Twice during the day he has put himself in my path—not uttering a word, but glaring at me with a blank and fish-like eye. I don’t like it, he’s such an ugly old creature. You said he

was a fisherman. Why doesn't he go fishing and let me alone ?

Graham laughed. Though Ethel spoke flippantly enough, and with her usual exhibition of courage, she was obviously disconcerted and a little afraid.

'Don't be alarmed,' he said ; 'he is quite harmless. I suppose he has been up here setting otter-traps by the Black Lake, and you stumbled on him by accident. But how is it I find you here in such a lonely place ?'

'Oh, it is a favourite walk of mine—I like lonely places.'

'Are you not afraid ?'

'Mr. Graham, only two things in the world make me afraid—a mouse and a mad bull. There are no mice on the mountains, and the Highland bulls never go mad.'

He was silent, and now for the first time she noticed that he seemed agitated and full of gloom. She rose to her feet. He stood gazing at her with so strange an expression that she began to feel uncomfortable.

‘Mr. Graham, have I offended you?’

‘No, no!’ he answered, trembling and turning away his eyes.

She approached him softly, and touched him on the arm.

‘You know I would not do so for the world. Pray let us be friends.’

‘Don’t speak to me!’ he cried, with a hidden gesture of pain. ‘Don’t touch me! I can’t bear it!’

‘What?’

He had taken the plunge, and now his words came fast and thick. As he spoke

his hands were clenched, his face crimson, and he trembled with excitement.

‘ If you had a woman’s heart you would know. You have poisoned my life, and my sister’s life. I have come from her sick-bed. You think I can bear to stand by your side—to look in your eyes—to hear your voice—and to know you despise me and mine, as he despises my poor sister. We may not be equals—in the world’s eyes we are not—but that is the more reason you should spare me the pretence of a kindness you do not feel.’

Startled by this tirade, Ethel gazed at the speaker in surprise. Pride soon came to her aid, and with an air of hauteur she looked him from head to foot.

He laughed fiercely.

‘ Yes, frown upon me—drive me from

you—I can bear that better; the other drives me mad.’

‘What have I done?’ she exclaimed.

‘It is pastime for you, I know, to play with a man’s heart; but,’ he added between his set teeth, ‘don’t go too far.’

She turned on her heel.

‘You are impertinent, and I will leave you.’

‘No, you shall stay!’

In one moment he had reached her side, and was holding her by both hands.

Her book fell to the ground. She stood trembling with surprise and anger, unable to articulate a word.

‘It is your turn now,’ he cried, ‘to listen to me. Remember we are alone together—this is a solitary place—cry your loudest and no man will hear you. To-day I am

strong and you are weak. I asked you for pity once. It is your turn to ask for pity now !

‘ No !’

‘ Are you not afraid ?’

‘ Of you, sir ? Certainly not. You are hurting my wrist—release me.’

‘ Not till you have heard me out.’

‘ Very well, I’m all attention.’

‘ I told you that I loved you,’ cried Graham, hoarse with passion, and trembling with the intensity of his own emotions. ‘ You laughed at my love. Well, I tell it you again. I love you, fine lady though you are. Will you laugh now ?’

Despite his dangerous look, she murmured :

‘ Yes,’ and actually forced a faint laugh.

Before she could utter another sound he

had lifted her up in his arms, and was running with her towards the Devil's Bridge. Before he came to the brink of the crag, however, he set her down, and, still retaining his hold upon her, continued :

‘Do you know the thought that often took me when we were by the side of Loch Drummdhu ? It was this—to clasp you in my arms, and take you down with me to drown ! Your look, your voice drive me mad, because I love you. There runs the river—a few steps and we should die together. Tell me, are you not afraid *now* ?’

‘No,’ she faltered, pale as death.

There was a long pause. Her eyes met his with courage, and they gazed steadfastly at each other.

‘You are right,’ he said, releasing her with a groan. ‘You knew me better than I knew myself. I could not harm you. Farewell!’

And with broken voice and misty eyes he turned away. Touched by his terrible passion and sorrow, she said, softly :

‘Why are you so violent with me?’

‘Because,’ he answered, with averted head, ‘if my spirit did not rise against you, my love would kill me. O God! God! I cannot play with my feelings and keep calm. Go away! Tell your fine friends what I have said, and share your scorn with them.’

‘You are ungenerous, Mr. Graham. I have always kept your secret.’

‘Have you?’ he said quickly, turning his eyes upon her.

‘ I have.’

‘ Even from him ?’

‘ To whom do you allude ?’

‘ To him—that man—his name chokes me—the lord you are to marry ?’

‘ He knows nothing. But why are you so bitter against him ? What has he done ?’

‘ Bonnie as you are, my sister is as bonnie ; he has poisoned her soul with his lying words of love.’

‘ I am very sorry——’

‘ Your sorrow will not heal her,’ he answered bitterly ; ‘ nor will it heal me. Tell me, is it all settled, then ? *Must* you marry him ?’

She was about to stammer out an evasive reply, but he interrupted her :

‘ No need to tell me—I see it in your

face. Well, God knows you were never made for *me*, though I hope the man that gets you will love you half as well. Good-bye ! good-bye !

Before she could make any reply he was out of hearing, hurrying away as if towards the mountains. She stood silent, watching his figure till it disappeared among the crags.

Then she smiled sadly, and began to walk slowly towards the Devil's Bridge.

She paused on the brink of the river and looked down. The spate was rushing past with a thunderous sound.

'How dark and wild !' she thought ; 'how like *him* ! After all, I adore a man !'

She set her foot upon the bridge, holding the guiding-rope. A few steps, and she

was in the centre. Just as she reached it she glanced towards the trees on the further side of the gorge, and saw—or seemed to see—a ghastly human face glaring out upon her. At that moment the bridge itself seemed yielding beneath her tread.

She uttered a wild scream and clutched the rope. Another scream! She was hanging by the hands. She screamed again, and saw, as the loose planks broke beneath her feet, the ghastly face glaring at her again.

Then, dazed, horror-stricken, she fell, with another wild scream, down into the depths of the roaring flood.

END OF VOL. II.







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