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THE SEERS' CAVE.

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The desert gave him visions wild— The midnight wind came wild and dead— Swell'd with the voices of the dead; From the future battle-field His eye beheld the ranks of the dead; Thus the lone seer from mankind hur'd, Shaped forth a disembodied world."

Scott.

In a certain wild and romantic glen in the Highlands of Scotland, there is a cave opening beneath the brow of a huge overhanging cliff, and half concealed by wreathed roots and wild festoons of brier and woodbine. Several indistinct traditions remain of this cave's having been in former days, the abode of more than one holy hermit and gifted seer. From these it derived the name which it commonly received, Coir-nan-Taischatrin, or, The Cave of the Seers. At a little distance within the glen, upon its sunny side, stood Castle Feracht. The elevation on which it was built, gave it a prospect of the whole glen, without detaching it from the hills and woods around; and a space had been cleared of trees, so that, though completely surrounded, their leafy screen only curtained, not obscured it.

Castle Feracht had long been the residence of a powerful branch of the Macphersons. In that far retirement repeated generations of that daring family had grown up and rushed forth, like young eagles from their mountain eyrie, to the field of strife; and not unfrequently never return. Such had been the fate of Angus Macpherson, in consequence of an accidental encounter with the Gordons, between whom and the Macphersons there had long subsisted a deadly feud. The death of his father had the effect of fixing upon the mind of his son, Ewan Macpherson, a feeling of stern and deadly resentment against all who had ever been the foes of his turbulent clan. The stripling seemed to fret at the slow pace of time, and to long for those years in which his arm might bare sufficient force to wield his father's broadsword, that he might rush to vengeance. Such had often been his secret thoughts, when he at length reached a period of life which made him able to put the suggestions of his vindictive mind into execution; but a strong and arousing spirit, to which we need not farther allude, passed over the land, and he forgot for a time his personal animosities in feelings and purposes of a more general and absorbing nature. The powerful sympathy of thousands, lending all their united energies towards one point, and laying aside their individual pursuits, in order to contribute to the advancement of that all-engrossing aim, laid its influence upon his soul, and he joined the company, and aided in the general plans of those whom he would have joyed to have met in deadly combat. Those against whom his hostility had been less violent, he had learned to meet almost on terms of friendship though dashed at times with looks of coldness.

Among those half-forgiven foes was Allan Cameron, a younger son of that family of the Camerons which stood next in hereditary dignity to the chief. The feud between the Macphersons and Camerons had never been very deadly, and might, perhaps, have been forgotten, had Macpherson been less accustomed to 'rake up the ashes of his fathers.' Cameron, though still a very young man, had been obliged early to mingle with the world, and had acquired that habit of ready decision which gives its possessor an ascendancy over almost all with whom he had any intercourse. Notwithstanding his youth, therefore, he was of considerable influence; and being brought repeatedly into contact with Macpherson, there was something of a shy and distant friendship between them. Cameron soon perceived the coldness of Macpherson; but as his own generous and cultivated mind was far superior to the influence of prejudices, such as had thrown a gloom over the whole being of Macpherson, he knew not, never dreamt, that he was an object of secret dislike to him; and, with his usual frank kind-heartedness, exerted himself to win the favour of a man so distinguished for personal daring as the dark-browed lord of Glen Feracht.

During the course of the operations in which they were engaged, the decisive resolution and activity of Cameron had repeatedly attracted the notice of Macpherson. Several times had he said to himself, 'Were he not a Cameron, he would be a gallant fellow!' At length, one day Macpherson was severely wounded, and rescued from immediate death by the fearless intrepidity and fiery promptness of Cameron. Macpherson's stern sullenness was subdued. Ere yet recovered from his wounds, he clasped Cameron's hand in token of cordial friendship; and so far laid aside his distant coldness as to invite Allan Cameron to accompany him to Glen Feracht, when their present enterprise should have come to a termination.

That termination came sooner than had been

expected; and Cameron found it not only convenient but prudent to accompany his fellow soldier to the secret retreat of Castle Feracht. Cameron, an ardent admirer of nature's beauties, yielded all his soul to the emotions inspired by the wild and rugged entrance to Glen Feracht; nor could he suppress repeated exclamations of delight when all the softer beauties of the quiet glen opened upon his sight. Macpherson observed his admiration, and paced over the daisied sward of his own valley with a more lofty step. Nor was there less proud satisfaction in his heart and eye as he conducted his guest to the hall of his fathers, and presented to him his only sister, bidding her, at the same time, know in Allan Cameron the preserver of her brother's life.

Elizabeth Macpherson rose and stepped blushing forward to receive her young and gallant guest. She was just on the verge of womanhood—that most fascinating period, when the tender and deep sensibilities of the woman begin to give a timid dignity to the liveliness of the girl. The open and rather ardent expression of her happy countenance was sweetly repressed and tempered by the pure veil of maidenly modesty; yet her graceful and commanding stature, the fire of her bright blue eye, and her free and stately step and gesture, told that the spirit of her fathers dwelt strong in the bosom of their lovely daughter. The heart of Allan Cameron bounded and fluttered in his breast as he advanced to salute this beautiful mountain-nymph. He had braved, undaunted, the brow of man when darkened with the frown of deadly hostility, but he shrank with a new and undefinable tremor before the blushing smile of a youthful maiden's cheek and eye. His self-possession seemed for once to have forsaken him; and had Macpherson been acquainted with the human heart, he must have seen that a new and irresistible feeling was rapidly taking possession of his generous preserver's bosom. He saw in it, however, but the awkwardness of a first interview between two strangers of different sexes; and, in order to relieve Cameron, led him away to see all the beautiful and romantic scenery of the glen, particularly Coir-nan-Taischatrin.

But it was not long ere the graceful person and fascinating manners of Cameron made an impression upon the artless and warm-hearted maiden. At first, her brother's intimate friend, the preserver of his life, had, in her view, just claims to her attention and grateful kindness; but she soon felt that she esteemed, not to say loved, him for himself. The preserver of her brother would at all times have been dear to her; but Allan Cameron woke in her heart a feeling inexpressibly more deep, more tender, more intense.

Art had little influence in directing the conduct of the youthful lovers; and it was not long till they experienced all that heaven of delight which arises in the heart upon being assured of the mutual return of affection. They had, however, kept their love hid from Ewan Macpherson; both because his dark and gloomy manner forbade all approaches to familiar confidence, and because, from the peculiar nature of love, mystery and concealment are necessary to give it its highest zest. Whatever might have been the cause, certain it was that Allan Cameron and Elizabeth Macpherson planned the little excursions, which they now frequently made together, in such a manner, that they might, as much as possible, avoid being seen by Ewan.

At length, however, the suspicions of the proud chieftain were aroused. It had never entered into his mind that Cameron might, by any possibility, raise his presumptuous hopes so high as to dream of loving the sister of Ewan Macpherson; and no sooner did he suspect the truth, than he dashed from his mind every friendly and grateful feeling towards the man who had saved his life; and saw in Allan Cameron only the hereditary foe of his clan, whose daring insolence had attempted to disgrace the name of Macpherson by seeking to win the heart of its most loftily descended maiden. Full of resentment at what he deemed so deep an insult, he was ranging the groves and thickets of Glen Feracht in quest of Cameron, like a wolf prowling for his unconscious victim.

The evening sun was at that time throwing his long lines of slanting glory across the summits of the mountains, and lighting the clouds of the west with a radiance too dazzling to be gazed upon, yet too magnificent to permit the eye and the excited soul to wander for a moment from the contemplation of its celestial splendour. Upon a gentle eminence, whence the castle and the greater part of the glen might be distinctly viewed, stood the lovers. They gazed with silent delight on the beauty and magnificence of the scene around them; yet, amidst their engrossing raptures, they had still enough of individual feeling remaining to be sensible of that warm palpitation of the heart which, in the presence of a beloved object, so greatly enhances every feeling of delight. On a sudden, they were startled by a rustling noise in

the adjoining thicket; and immediately forth bounded Bran, Macpherson's stag hound, his master's constant attendant.

'My brother must be near,' said Elizabeth, in an anxious whisper; 'and we shall be discovered. Good Heavens! what shall we do?'

'Perhaps he may not have seen us,' replied Cameron; 'you can hasten to the castle, and I shall attempt to detain him here till you shall have reached it.'

She gave no answer; but, casting around a glance of great alarm, and fixing one tender, anxious look for one moment upon Cameron, she hastened away through secret but well known paths. She did not, however, escape the eye of Ewan Macpherson, who had thus unseasonably approached the lovers in their retirement. At this discovery madness swelled in his heart and boiled along his veins; but, suppressing his passion, he approached with haughty staidness the spot where Cameron stood apparently fixed in deep and all-engrossing admiration of the glowing beauties of earth and heaven.

'The beauties of animated nature appear to have charms in the tasteful eyes of Allan Cameron,' said Macpherson, as he advanced.

'They have,' replied Cameron; 'and who could stand on this lovely spot and witness so much beauty and magnificence, without feeling a glow of rapture pervade his frame, and chain him to the place in delightful admiration. How happy ought the man to be who can call a place of such loveliness and grandeur his own.'

'Stay! hold! Allan Cameron; let us understand each other. Does Allan Cameron mean to say that these woods and streams of Glen Feracht, the lofty mountains around him, the tents of the evening sky over his head and these alone, have stirred up his soul to this pitch of enthusiasm? Or must Ewan Macpherson flatter himself that his sister's charms have also had some slight influence in producing these rapturous emotions?'

Uncertain whether Macpherson was in earnest or in jest, Cameron hesitated to answer; and continued gazing on the mountain top, bright, and crimson, and airy, as if to terminate in an edge of flame.

'Dishonor blast the name of Macpherson if I endure this!' exclaimed the fierce Ewan, bursting into a tumult of fury. 'Proud Cameron, dost thou disdain to answer the chief of the Macphersons? Are we fallen so low that a Cameron shall despise us? Speak! answer me! else I strike thee to my foot like a base hound! Has thou dared to mention love—even to think of love for the sister of Macpherson?'

'And where were the mighty offence, though a Cameron should aspire so high as to love the sister of Macpherson?'

'Where were the offence?—I tell thee, boy, he had better never have seen the light. But I will not trifle with thee. Hast thou so dared?'

'I am little used to answer such interrogations. But I will not willingly quarrel with Ewan Macpherson. My heart must have been colder than it is, could I have enjoyed the company of Elizabeth Macpherson without yielding me to that influence of witching beauty which softens and subdues the soul.'

'Thou hast not said—thou dost not dare to say—thou lovest her! Cameron, I have felt friendship for thee. Thou hast resided in the hall of my fathers. My hand is withheld from thee. But if thou dost not renounce, at once and for ever, all pretensions to the love of Elizabeth Macpherson, thou hast looked thy last on this green earth and on those glorious heavens.'

'Renounce all pretensions to the love of Elizabeth Macpherson! I tell thee, proud man, that the daughter of the highest Macpherson might think herself honored by an alliance with a Cameron.'

'Insolent serf! unsay thy words, or maintain them with thy sword!—Crouch, like a low-born slave as thou art, and beg Macpherson's pardon, if thou darest not bare thy coward blade.'

'Macpherson, thou dost not call me slave or coward, when, side by side, we two stemmed the stream of battle in its wildest rage;—nor was it a coward blade that bewed out a safe retreat for thee, when thine own arm waxed weak and thy step were unequal on the field of the slain.'

'Thou dost well to speak of what thou knowest will prevent me from chastising thy base treachery. 'Tis what I might have expected:—'tis done like a cowardly Cameron.'

'But that thou hast a sister, Macpherson, that taunt had cost thee dear. Thou knowest that thou speakest falsely.'

'Falsely!—defend thee, villain, or die like a slave! The feud of our fathers is but renewed—their spirits behold our strife!' cried Macpherson, and, drawing his claymour, rushed upon Cameron almost before his blade was bared for the combat.

Macpherson transported to a pitch of frenzy, thought not of artful skill, dreamt not of personal danger. He showered blow on blow, with the untemperate fury of a maniac; all his aim, every

effort, being directed to destroy his foe. Cameron with less bodily strength, was possessed of calm and dauntless courage, superior skill in the use of his weapon, and unmatched personal activity. Unwilling to harm the brother of the object of his affection, he only defended himself, retreating and warding off the furious, but aimless blows of Macpherson. The frowning cheek and brow of the baffled chief waxed grimmer with disappointed hate; and, changing his mode of attack, he swept circling round his young and agile antagonist, endeavoring thus to throw him off his guard. Cameron turning dexterously on his heel, held him still at the sword's point, and allowed him to expend his strength in desperate efforts of fierce but ineffectual violence. During their combat, however, some of Macpherson's gillies approached the spot; and Cameron perceived them nearing him with kindling eyes, and holding in their impatient hands the *skian dhu* half unsheathed. He knew that Macpherson was as honorable as brave; and he knew that he might with perfect safety trust his life to the honor of any highlander, under any circumstance where the peculiar honor of his clan was not concerned. But he also knew that no clansman would esteem any deed a crime which should preserve the life or reputation of his chief.—'There was, he saw but one means of saving his life. Collecting all his strength he beat aside one of Macpherson's furious blows, and bounding upon him as a crouching tiger springs upon his prey, he wrenched his claymour from his hand, dashed him to the earth with the mere violence of the assault; wielding a weapon in either hand, he struck to the ground two of the opposing clansmen, plunged into the thickets as a mountain stag bursts through his covert when the opening pack is near, and disappeared in an instant among the crushing and closing boughs of the underwood. Roaming with disappointed rage, Macpherson sprung from the ground, snatched a *skian dhu* from one of his prostrated followers, and shouting, 'Revenge!' rushed into the thickets in headlong pursuit. In vain. A fleet foot than that of Allan Cameron never pressed the mountain heath, and in a short time, he was far beyond all danger from his enraged pursuer; who, after ranging every dell and nook in vain, returned to Castle Feracht, chafing and foaming with impotent rage, and uttering dire, but unavailing threats of vengeance.

What would it avail to relate the chieftain's wrath, when he found himself compelled to forego his hopes of sweet revenge, and to endure what he esteemed a new and a more daring insult? Fret and chafe as he might, he knew that his high-souled sister would not be deterred, by threats of personal injury, from following the bent of her own inclination. He therefore assembled his followers in her presence, and caused them all to bind themselves by a deep oath, to avenge the quarrel of their chief upon Allan Cameron, should he ever dare to set foot within Glen Feracht, enforcing his commands by threats of deadliest vengeance, should any clansman show him favor, hold intelligence with him or meet him in terms of peace. Elizabeth Macpherson saw his purpose; but she scorned to display her emotion. A flush indeed mantled her brow, and her eye shed one sparkle of indignation—but she remained silent. Fraternal affection was banished the halls of Castle Feracht. An increasing gloom and moodiness of heart began to sink upon the rugged chief; and at length to prevent his dark soul's loneliness from becoming altogether insupportable, he began to take an interest in the affairs first of his own clan, next of the neighboring clans, and finally of the nation. He thus became acquainted with many a wild and many a wondrous legend, which might otherwise never have reached his observation; and his rather uncultivated mind was not able to resist the encroachments of superstition. Among others a firm belief in the reality of the *taisch*, or second-sight, took possession of his mind; and he listened to the many almost incredible relations concerning it, with a wild excitement of spirit. These changes in the manners and pursuits of Macpherson, were from time to time, reported to Allan Cameron, in spite of the stern threats which had been denounced against all who should hold intercourse with him. A youth, the cho-ait [foster-brother] of Allan Cameron, had repeatedly, under the assumed character of a wandering hunter, entered within the precincts of Glen Feracht, where he was unknown; and, picking up all the information that could be obtained, without awakening suspicion, returned with it to his youthful chief.

Ewan Macpherson was one day informed, by his aged henchman, Ranald Glas, that a second-sighted man had arrived in the glen, conducted, according to his own account, by the power of the *taisch*: that he was extremely old, and his visions were appallingly vivid: his thoughts were terror, and his words were fire. The revelations of things to come passed frequent and powerful across his soul, bright and living as realities;

and his language was that of one who constantly held strange communication with scenes and beings not of this world. Though his foot had never trod the heath of Glen Feracht, he described with the most perfect accuracy, its castle, stream, and cave; saying that he was come to lay his bones beside those of the ancient seers and holy men who had inhabited Coir-nan-Taischatrin. This was enough to rouse the curiosity of Macpherson. Pursuing his inquiries, he learned that the seer had taken up his abode in the cave, and that he had already foretold to some of the clan, things, part of which were accomplished, and the rest expected with the utmost confidence. In order to satisfy his curiosity, Macpherson determined to visit the hoary seer and learn from himself the nature of his visions.

The shadows of the pine and oak were stretching far across the ravine in the slant evening sunshine, when Ewan Macpherson appeared in front of the cave. His eye could not penetrate the deep darkness within it; and yielding to a feeling of indescribable awe which crept over his soul, he remained for some time silent and motionless before its entrance. At length he ordered one of his gillies to acquaint the wondrous inmate that Ewan Macpherson wished to hold some converse with him. Forward came the venerable man; and his appearance, in the dimming twilight had no tendency to diminish the strange delirium of superstitious feelings which had absorbed the whole mind of the bewildered chief. The sage bent one searching glance upon his visitor; and, seeming to have penetrated the state of his mind, advanced into more open view.

A long and squared rod seemed to support his shaking frame as he came forward, tottering and halting at every step. The shaggy hide of an enormous wolf, thrown loosely over his shoulders, served partly to clothe him, partly to disguise his form by the air of savage wildness which a garment so uncouth gave its wearer. From his belt depended some instruments, with the use of which Macpherson was entirely unacquainted; together with a *skian dhu* of exquisite and uncommon workmanship. His bonnet alone was like that of other men; for what could a true highlander substitute for the blue bonnet? but he neither doffed it, nor made any motions of obeisance as he approached. A long white beard flowed half down his bosom, waving heavily and solemnly as he moved. The fire of an intensely bright eye was half hid by his deep, grey, slabby eye-brows; yet, from beneath that grim paint-house, they emitted occasional sparkings like diamonds in the dark.

'Chief of Macpherson!' said he, in a deep hollow voice, 'man of the dark brow and ruthless hand! what seekest thou with Moran of the Wild?' But, ere Macpherson could reply, the sage cast the Wolf hide back from his right shoulder—extended the long square rod in his firmly clenched hand—raised himself up to his full height, while his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and gleaming like two balls of living fire, and his whole frame agitated, and as if it were dilating with the internal workings of his wild visionary spirit. Macpherson shook and shrunk in his presence.

'They come! they come!' exclaimed the seer—the wild, the dreadful, the undefinable, the unutterable, the shadowy forms and seemings of things and actions to be! They crowd upon me in powers and numbers unendurable, inconceivable! Words never formed by human breath sound within my heart, and tell of things that mortal tongue may never utter. Eyes, clear, cold, dead, bright, and chill as winter moonshine, look into my soul, and fill it with all their lucid meanings! Oh, scene of blood and woe! when wilt thou end? Thou bright-haired angel, make the doom be thine! Fair lady of the stately brow! on! let me see more! His lips quivered, but he uttered not another word. He remained fixed, rigid, statue-like, as if chilled into stone, bereft of life and motion by the terrible vision. At length his extended arm dropped by his side; and, heaving a long, shuddering sigh, he leaned his drooping frame upon his rod, trembling and exhausted.

After a considerable pause, Macpherson ventured to address him, with the intention of inquiring into the nature of his vision. 'Speak not to me Ewan Macpherson,' said he. 'Seek not to know the fate thou wilt and must know all too soon. Thy path through life has been blood-stained and devious. No warnings may now avail thee. But that lady—might she be rescued from misery and horror! Chief! if the safety and happiness of thy father's daughter be dear to thee, bid her assume the spirit of her race, and come alone to Coir-nan-Taischatrin.—Tell her that Moran of the Wild has that to reveal to her which concerns her, and thee, too, deeply. And mark me, Chief! unless thou cease to pursue the feuds of thy fathers, thy course will be brief and bloody will be its close.' Thus saying, he turned and feebly dragged his