

The Rival Clansmen:

A Scottish Vendetta.

CHAPTER IX.

FLIGHT OF FLORA—A SORROWING MOTHER—OVERTAKEN BY IAN.

Yes, Flora Macgregor was gone; but where?

Before we answer this question it will be necessary to explain how she came to be at Droghdaire, though that to some extent may already have been surmised.

After the surprise by the military, the Clansmen did not stir from Malrubha's Ruin until nightfall, when they arose set about a general removal, for which, by Cameron's directions, they had been preparing throughout the day.

At nightfall, the latter drew McKenzie and one or two other members of the band aside, and gave them minute instructions as to where they were to proceed; and then, leaving the whole movement in McKenzie's charge, he divested himself of a dress which he had donned before emerging from the ruins beneath the ruin to attack the soldiers in the morning, and, again attiring himself simply as Cameron of Droghdaire, he went to Flora's cell and intimated to her that he wished her to join him immediately, upon which she rose, and signified that she was ready to accompany him.

He then led her from the ruin, and, embarking in a boat, rowed to the south shore of the Loch, a Clansman accompanying them to take back the craft. When he landed, telling her to follow him, Cameron strode forward without saying more, and it was with much difficulty that Flora could keep pace with him, so fast did he walk.

He ever and anon glanced back to see that she was following, so that no opportunity of escape offered itself. In this way the journey to Kinloch-Ewe was performed. Here Cameron ordered the landlord to fetch his horse, and asked whether another could be procured for the use of Flora. Gregor answered in the affirmative, in a short time appeared leading both animals to the door. Cameron at once mounted his own steed, while Flora was assisted upon the other, and they took the road up Glen-Dochart, in the direction of Achnasheen.

The poor girl was sad at heart, as she now saw that her destination was beyond all doubt Droghdaire—her home—pardon the expression! It was an abode of misery to her, resembling a prison more than the scene of bright, pleasant, tender associations which the sweet name "home" suggests.

Her mind was tormented with agony, as she thought what might possibly have befallen Hector, of whose whereabouts she knew nothing, although she strongly suspected that he had been a prisoner in the dungeons at Malrubha's Ruin. But she had heard the conflict between the Clansmen and the military, and truly believed that the Clansmen, although successful in the struggle, had been obliged to abandon their stronghold.

Then if Hector should be found to be in the way of Ian or Cameron his life would not long be spared him. And even supposing it were spared, if he should be removed to some other place of concealment, how was she to ascertain aught of his whereabouts? Surely—surely they were not separated for ever? Alas! it seemed as if it were so.

And so her thoughts ran during the journey. It was nearly dawn on the following morning when, wearied and exhausted, she espied Droghdaire in the distance, and in a short time after her uncle and she rode up to the entrance. Flinging his rein to a shillie, Cameron sprang from his saddle, and then assisted Flora to dismount. He led her upstairs to her own room, and when he had shown her to a seat, he said—

"Flora, you will please prepare yourself for your bridal. I have arranged that you are marry Ian McKenzie this night. He will arrive some time during the afternoon."

A mist appeared before her eyes, and her brain reeled as she heard the words. She was so astonished that she could make no reply.

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