

The Rival Clansmen :

A Scottish Vendetta.

CHAPTER III.

THE M'KENZIES RAFFLED—AN UNFORTUNATE GIRL—LOCH MAREE—DANGER AGAIN—THREATENS THE LOVERS.

"How true it is that the course of true love never does run smooth!" remarked Flora to Hector, after Gordon had left, as they arm-in-arm slowly retraced their steps. "Just think of this poor unsuspecting girl loving, with all the love of a warm affectionate nature, this villain, this viper, this wolf in sheep's clothing, who only sought her ruin. Ah! how keen must her anguish have been when she fully realised that she had been betrayed! And how often is the wicked course repeated. Oh! I do feel grateful to the Great Ruler of my destiny that I have been so fortunate as to have received the love of a man whom I know that I can trust, who cherishes my affections, and who will not betray the trust I have reposed in him. And this I feel to be the more important as I look around me on so much deceit, and feel that I could have found no other so worthy of my love as you, my own brave Hector."

"Blessings on you, my darling," replied the young man, passionately. "You have made me proud, indeed, to think that I am considered so worthy of your esteem and confidence. It has been my aim since ever I knew you to prove worthy of your love, and I hope that I may never do anything unworthy of your implicit confidence, nor cause you to regret the step you have now taken at my solicitation. I only hope we may be able successfully to carry out our intention. My father's estate is nearly thirty miles distant, which is much more than we can accomplish to-day, and it is just possible that your uncle, if he has discovered the road which we took may be able to overtake us before we reach Castle McLeod. I do not think there is anything further to fear from Ian M'Kenzie; he will not be likely to molest us further in the meantime."

"Did you hear the fearful yell that was raised when the rock rolled down the mountain? Surely some of his men must have been killed by it?"

"I am much of that opinion. If so, it will surely show him that Providence is against him in the new quarrel he has raised and the vow he has taken."

"But, dear Hector, you do not anticipate that my uncle will be able to overtake us?"

"I do not know, my love. It is quite possible that he may not; only we should not be too much startled and surprised although he do."

"But I will not return with him. Oh, you will not permit him to take me?"

"He shall certainly not be allowed to take you without your own consent, if I am at all able to prevent it."

"Thank you for these words, dearest. He will never have my consent to return while I have you to cling to."

"I do not doubt but he will try to again recover you. I cannot help thinking that he has some ends of his own to serve through you, which he wishes to carry out without consulting your feelings. His conduct towards you has been anything but the carrying out of the injunctions left him by your mother."

"Ah, yes; I know he has ends of his own to serve. He told me that he intended shortly to introduce me to a suitor for my hand, and that he was one whose suit he favoured."

"It will perhaps be too late when he again recovers you, my darling," replied Hector. "The step I have taken I have well considered. But for the mishap which befell us yesterday, we should ere this have been safe in my father's castle. There you will meet with a hearty welcome; for my sister will be delighted to see and to honour the lady of my choice. And the more glad will he be when I tell him that I have carried you away from those whose presence was becoming obnoxious to you. I speak not of the many other pleasures that await you, for they are not such as should influence any woman in her decision."

"You are right, dear Hector. Your father's love and friendship I, of course, desire to have; but the homage of the clansmen, the petty power within my reach, and all else are superfluous, since I am assured of having my own noble Hector beside me. With you I can dispense with all these; without you they would be as nothing. For you, and you only, have I risked incurring my uncle's displeasure."

"Then will I endeavour to make your future such that you will never regret the step you have taken," replied Hector. "I do wish that we were safe at Castle McLeod," said the maiden after a pause. "I have a strange fear, which I feel unable to shake off, that something may yet occur to separate us. When Gordon was with us, and we were all chatting to each other at random, I did not feel it so much; but now that we are alone, and my mind is directed to the matter, I feel a vague sense of loneliness and insecurity steal over me. I think we should not longer delay here, Hector, dear, but should push on at once."

"Pooh, pooh, these are groundless fears, Flora, darling. It is the fray with Ian M'Kenzie in the hut last night, and the pursuit of us by him and his men, that has unsettled your nerves. And the sense of loneliness is simply because of your absence from well-known and familiar objects, and because you see all strange around you. But do not be alarmed; with me you are quite safe. As to pushing on at present, I am quite agreeable to do so, and perhaps we may be able to procure a couple of horses from the landlord. With these we could easily reach our destination to-night, and they could be returned to-morrow. We shall now turn back, and I shall see about the animals. 'Twas a strange mishap that our own horses went amissing. I blame the Caterans of Ben-A-Chruil for the deed."

"They had sauntered on past the inn as they conversed, and had turned off from the main road on to the rough and rugged path which then led from Kinloch-Ewe on past Loch Clare to Torridon."

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Guelph, Sept. 29, 1873.

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A splendid Young Hyson Tea for 50c per lb.
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