

Simon Fraser that Duncanson was reading when he fell.

"Where is it?" asked Ninian sharply. "Fetch it, Donald, fetch it!"

It changed the whole position, and yet it had less than a dozen lines. "All I have got is the twig the fish were on," wrote Lovat. "They're gone on the road to Inveraray, round by Ruthven. And here I can do no more for you. I am beat to ken what your trouble is, but if it concerns Paul Macmaster umquhile of Drimdorran, the lad's papa, they have talked it out with Fraser, for he was shipped with them. I cannot lay hands on him; he may be with them."

With the letter in his hand, Ninian stood in the business closet pondering a while. He sought in its lines for what had crumbled the man who had got it, now lying up the stair, his warfare over. It was plainly not the news of their escape, for that was known to him already; it was the reference to Fraser. Ninian took out his tangled hank and absently began to pluck it, although the keys of Duncanson were there before him on the desk.

The room was sombre, darkened by the plaid still tacked above the window, and only half drawn over by the Muileach to let in the dim light of the foggy day. Ninian tugged it from its fastening when the Muileach left him to his business, and looked out into the garden. Beyond the gravel and a plot of perished flowers was nothing visible; the fog hung over all. From a twig of rose-bush nailed to the ribs of the window moisture dripped; there was a smell of mould and rotten leafage.

He turned his first attention to the desk. Everything was in the trimmest order. It was a great, deep oak 'scretoire, its drawers filled up with letter-books, accounts, and leases. He started at the lowest drawer, having lit a candle; sat on the floor, and patiently went through its whole contents. There was no need to scrutinise either individual letters copied, or accounts; their character as a whole was obvious: they were con-