

The  
Inglenook

## FIONA M'IVER.

A ROMANCE OF THE WESTERN ISLES.

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### CHAPTER XVI.

(Continued.)

'She is very grateful for all that you've done and offered; I'm sure she will have told you so.'

'Yes. The truth is, Mr. M'Iver, I'm not so generous as you imagine. Fiona is your most precious jewel, and I am going to ask you for her. That is why I take such an interest in your affairs; your burdens will soon be my own, and I will quickly throw them all away. Lieutenant Waldegrave has already forgotten Fiona; but I haven't. I have loved her all along, and have never given up the hope of winning her.'

'Ah, I had begun to guess as much,' replied the old laird with much gentleness. 'And if Fiona would only consent, you know, Nial, that you would have my heartiest good wishes.'

'Oh, Fiona will consent, when once she sees things in the right light; I'm sure she will.'

'Do you think so? I would not like you to be disappointed again.'

'No fear,' answered Nial confidently. 'Waldegrave's bad conduct will help me. She will find him out, and learn how much better the old friend is than the new acquaintance. Why, see, Mr. M'Iver, she has given me this rose—given it to me as a token that all our old differences are buried and forgotten. Is not that a happy omen?'

'I hope it is. I shall be glad, very glad, Nial, if you're not mistaken. But I would not have you too confident. I fear—'

'Fear! fear what?' asked Nial angrily. He was losing patience.

'I'm afraid you've mistaken a mere token of friendship for something more,' answered Torquil M'Iver with quiet dignity, as he scanned Nial's face more narrowly.

'Oh, but I've claims now which Fiona cannot and will not ignore. You will speak to her, reason with her, and tell her that I shall accept of no dismissal now.'

'Fiona is thankful for all that you have done, Nial; but she is a proud and high-spirited girl.'

But the coarser side of Nial's nature had broken out, and he went on recklessly.

'You must bring her to reason.'

'Fiona will be mainly guided by the light of her own reason and her own heart,' answered Mr. M'Iver quietly.

He was highly displeased with Nial; but yet inclined to think the things he disliked due to the bitterness of disappointment. Nial must mean well, and had suffered a good deal. So he proceeded with much gentleness:

'I think if you would be patient, Nial, you would gain your wish. Don't be hasty. Give Fiona time to recover herself. She is in great perplexity, and she is much too unhappy and pre-occupied with other thoughts to weigh anything I might say to her.'

Nial knew that his case was too desperate for him to wait long, but he also saw that unless he controlled himself he would frustrate his own ends.

'Well, Mr. M'Iver,' he replied, 'the more you allow me to do for you, the more reason Fiona will have for thinking well of me. She

is a noble girl; but she is romantic. The situation may change sooner than we think, and in the meantime, I hope you'll do all you can for me.'

They parted: Nial Mor occupied with dark schemes for attaining his end quickly; while Mr. M'Iver bowed himself down beneath a heavy load of care.

### CHAPTER XVII.

A CRUEL BLOW.

'Ye clarty callant, stap yer ill wark,' cried Nancy Bell, 'or I'll gie ye the like ye never had afore.'

Another tuft of grass, followed by a shout of laughter as it struck her on the shoulder, indicated how little her threat was feared.

Nancy's grotesque appearance had stirred the curiosity and then the mischievous humour of some half-dozen boys and girls let loose from school. She had a short black pipe in her mouth, and was sitting mounted on the lid of a rough deal coffin bound transversely upon a cart. The horse moved along with weary gait and drooping head, and Nancy herself looked a picture of abject discomfort. She wore an old black bonnet blown awry by the wind, and soaked through and through with the rain, and a shabby black gown. A sack from whose corners the wet still dripped was thrown across her shoulders.

The rain had ceased, and the children, gathering blackberries on their way home, glanced with some awe at the strange figure, until one boy, named like his father—who has already appeared in our story—Davie Anderson, a boy bigger and bolder than the others, impressed with the absurdity of Nancy's mien, pulled up a tuft of grass when see was well by, and flung it at her.

'Shame on ye!' cried Nancy, turning round and shaking her stick at the boy. 'Ye ill-mannered coof, ye chiel o' the deil, hoo daur ye dae the like o' that? Hae ye no respect' for the deid? Wad ye hae the corp' rise up, an' grip haud o' ye? Faith, I ken ye. Ye are the son o' yon touzled-headed, unbelievin', dram-drinkin' Davie Anderson, ad' gin ye dinna tak' tent an' min', ye'll come to a bad end.'

This silenced the giggling of the girls for a moment, but the boy, undaunted, flung another clod, and cried out:—

'Hoot woman! I wonder ye're no feared yersel' to sit on the coffin smokin' yer dirty auld pipe. The corp' will no be thanking ye. Will ye no get up, an' let it hae a breath o' fresh air?'

'I'll be gettin' doon, gin ye dinna stap yer ill wark,' replied Nancy, pulling up the horse, 'an' gin I lay haun' on ye, I'll mak' yer lugs burn, that I will, ye lazy loon.'

'What is the matter?' asked a clear voice, as turning a corner of the road, Fiona appeared on the scene.

There was a dead silence for a moment, and then the children took to their heels. But Fiona saw at a glance what had occurred, and commanding Davie Anderson to return, she severely reprimanded him for his conduct, and made him beg Nancy Bell's pardon, and then dismissed him.

'Well, Nancy,' she said, after expressing her regret at the rudeness of the boy, 'I

heard that the poor old man, your uncle, was dead, but I thought he would have been buried at the clachan yonder. This is a long way for you to bring him all alone by yourself. I suppose, however, you wish to lay him beside his friends?'

'That's just it,' replied Nancev, laying her hand gently on the coffin. 'Ye ken, Miss M'Iver, he was a guid man, an' a' his fowk are sleepin' under the shadow o' Ben Ruadh. He wadna rest weel gin he warena beside them. He's ma mither's ain brither, and she was aye fond o' him when she was leevin'; an' I ken richt weel that when the arch angel blows his horn at the resurrection they wad be sair troubled gin they didna wake up side by side. Sae as I was the only aye o' his kin fowk left, I got the loan o' this auld horse an' cart, an' I hae brocht him awa mysel'. An' faith! he was a' there wae to bring awa'. They fowk in yon glen hae cleared aff a' the bits o' things he had left.'

'That's a shame, Nancy; they belonged to you. It is very good of you to put yourself to so much trouble to carry out his wishes. But you will not be able to reach home to-night. This has been a wretched day for you to 'travel in, and you look quite wet through and worn-out already.'

'Ay, that's true eneugh, Miss M'Iver. Thae roads are that cut up an' heavy wi' the rain, an' this auld horse is gay stiff in the banes. It's bin hard wark gettin' owre thae last three or four miles, an' I was just thinkin' I wad gie to auld Morag Campbell's an' beg a night's lodgings wi' her.'

'That is the best thing you can do,' answered Fiona. 'My father is from home, but I could find a warm corner for you where you would be comfortable. Only that would be further for you to go. Come along; it's nearly a mile to Morag's. I'm sure she won't turn you away.'

'Ye're as kind as ye're bonnie, Miss M'Iver,' answered Nancy gratefully, 'an' I maun thank ye. Bu' ye needna gang out o' yer way. Auld Morag kens me weel eneugh, though we haena met for mony a lang day.'

'Oh, but I was on my way to see her,' answered Fiona, as they moved on together.

'Ye see,' said Nancy, 'things might hae bin far waur. The young laird is fu' o' queer notions, an' gay unreasonable-like noo. The fowk say it's a' yer fault, Miss M'Iver. I dinna ken, an' ye'll pardon my speakin' o't. Weel, he has taken it until his heid that h'll gang awa for a week's shootin' in yon island o' Eilean Dubh, o' a' places in the world—ye can ca' sic a far-awa oot-landish place in the world at a'. It's maist ridic'ulous, an' naethin' else will suit him but I maun gang wi' him an' mak' yon auld shieldin' fit for him to bid in. I never heard o' ony aye daein' the like o' that afore at this time o' the year. But a wilfu' man maun gang his ain gait. An' gin we had bin awa, as we sud hae bin afore noon, they would hae buried the auld man awa yonder, an' then I ken richt weel he wadna hae rested in his grave.'

'Going to Eilean Dubh?' exclaimed Fiona, thinking less at the moment of the extraordinary conduct of Nial Mor than of the happy day she had spent there in May with Geoffrey Waldegrave.