

The Rival Glansmen

A Scottish Vendetta.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE END OF TWO VILLAINS—THE WITCH OF BEN-LAIR REVEALS HER TRUE NAME AND CHARACTER—A STRANGE STORY.

"What is Flora Macgregor your grandchild?" exclaimed Hector, springing to his feet in surprise. "Then grasping the hand of the Witch of Ben-Lair, he continued—

"Glad, glad am I that I have found one who can fully sympathize with me; but how—?" He was unable to frame the question. He was so surprised at the information he had received that he was unable to speak.

"How comes it that she lived with Donald Cameron? you would ask. Donald Cameron was her mother's brother, as you know, and took charge of his sister's child when she died. But the story is a short one, though momentous, and I may just give it you from the beginning. And first, from this moment let me renounce the *nom de guerre* of the Witch of Ben-Lair, and let me be known by the name which rightfully belongs to me. I am Flora Douglas, the lady of Gowanybraes. It is fifty years since I was led, the bride of Graham Douglas, from Inverness to Gowanybraes, to take up my abode in what promised to be an Elysium of bliss. A year passed, and a son was born; only child it proved to be. This son grew to be man, and his twenty years passed over his head when the Chevalier de St. George came to Scotland to fight for the Crown. This proved the end of my happiness. Both father and son became interested in the struggle, and took sides, and as evil fortune would have it the sides they took were opposing ones—young Henry taking the side of the rebels, who, as you know, were beaten and humbled. This proceeding of his son much incensed Graham Douglas, who—Gowanybraes not being entailed—threatened to cut him off without a yard of land and without a penny of money, besides forbidding him to again enter his door, and doing all he could to put the King's soldiers on his track. Henry was young and light-hearted, and did not much heed his father's threats, for he rather liked the thought of toiling and making for himself a position and a name; indeed, he disliked the idea of being indebted for these things to those who had gone before him. My remonstrance with my husband availed nothing, for Graham Douglas was a man of stern, sullen disposition, and there was no such thing possible as turning him.

"Banished from the house, it was some time after comparative quiet had been restored that Henry again appeared in the neighborhood of Gowanybraes, and then it was only to have a stolen interview with me. This, at my urgent request, he frequently repeated, although he would tell me nothing of where he was residing, or his occupation. He seemed always the same cheerful, buoyant, light-hearted youth, full of spirit and of happiness; and this tended to cheer my heart and light in my spirits, for, because of the differences between us in relation to Henry, my husband and I had now but little intercourse with one another. But about a year afterwards I noticed a change in the look and manner of my son. He seemed to be haunted by care, and there was less of fire and spirit about him than usual. This to any but a mother's eye might not have been apparent, but it struck me, and I asked him what it meant. Then he told me that he had been in love, that he had wooed the object of his love, had won her, and they had been secretly united. In every way, he said, Mary Cameron—for such was her name—was a good and faithful wife, and fully worthy of him. What I said about the step he had taken I need not repeat. I had confidence enough in my son's wisdom to believe that I would have agreed with his choice had I been consulted; but I asked him what it was that caused him to be so downcast in spirits and so careworn-like. Then he gave me to understand his trouble. The question which haunted him was, How was his wife to be provided for? This, it was imperative, had to be answered. The expected birth of a babe on a day not distant made it necessary that the marriage, which had until now been kept secret, should be at once or shortly proclaimed. Mary Cameron was an orphan, and her only relative was a brother—the brother you, M'Leod, to your cost, know well—Donald Cameron of Droghdaire. To my son Gowanybraes rightfully belonged, but I know full well that were his father to hear of his marriage, it would, if possible, make him more incensed than ever; and therefore it was necessary that every precaution should be used to keep the knowledge from him. I therefore counselled Henry thus—to take Donald Cameron, his wife's brother, into his confidence, without ever letting his wife know he was to do so, and never did I give counsel which I have seen cause to regret as I have regretted that. Alas! alas! it cost my brave manly son his life.

As she uttered the last words, the old woman, covering her face with her hands bowed her head, and for some time sobbed heavily. Then recovering herself, she continued—

"He left me, and when he saw me next he told me that he had taken Cameron into confidence, that the child—a girl—had been born, and its name was Flora. Henry and Mary had up till now been residing in a small room in Inverness; but she, at his solicitation, had gone to Droghdaire—she, poor girl, unaware that her brother knew of her true circumstances, believing that he would now look upon her as a fallen outcast, but determined that she would not, until her husband should say it was safe to do so, reveal who was her husband.

"Meanwhile I set myself to think how I could best approach my husband; but here the hand of fate stepped in and made vain my scheming. Graham Douglas, while on the hunting field a bleeding, disfigured corpse, and I was a widow. A sad blow was that to me, for, though we differed on the matter I have spoken of, it became me to respect my husband for his unflinching adhesion to what he believed to be right, and before that estrangement took place there never was a husband kinder to a wife than was Graham Douglas to myself. Let me pass on to what followed, now I am near the end. Upon examining my husband's papers I found a document cutting off Henry without a penny or a yard of ground, as he had said, but—this caused me to weep with joy—it was unsigned. The funeral arrangements over, I made with all haste to Inverness, but could find no trace of my son. Thence with all speed to Droghdaire, where I met Donald Cameron. I eagerly inquired concerning my son and his wife, and thought a dagger had been pierced through my heart when he said that he knew nothing of my son, and then with a fearful oath exclaimed that if he knew where to find the world would quickly be rid of the villain.



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GUELPH, March 2, 1874