

The Rival Glansmen

A Scottish Vendetta.

CHAPTER XII.

A FIGHT—A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE—SHATTERED—SINKING!

Shouting and killing, the McLeods followed the now dispersed Caterans, but with little success, for, once clear of their opponents, they ran and doubled with such speed and agility that the clansmen were soon left behind; and to their chagrin they saw that the Caterans had escaped them.

"Come back, McLeods," shouted the Chieftain; "our work is now here. Search the cave for my son. I am glad you are safe, both of you," he continued, as Gordon approached, accompanied by the Witch of Ben-Lair. The Lowlander had with the others rushed after the Caterans when they first dispersed, and on his return had been joined by the old woman, who during the melee had taken shelter behind a rock, where she was quite safe.

"It's been a fell bit stramash," observed Gordon, wiping his sword and returning it to its scabbard, as he approached the Chieftain; "but I'm thinkin' yet McLeods has gien them a bit lesson. Gad! there's fewer doon than I thought there wad ha been," he exclaimed, looking around him.

"Fewer than might have been expected," returned the Chieftain. "By my claymore, but we were none too quick. I thought the Witch of Ben-Lair would have been tramped down before she could have escaped to a place of safety. And Roderick, I forgot about him. Ha! here he comes, looking as if he were unscathed. I thought he was out down."

"Nay," replied the clansman, who had heard his Chieftain's remarks; "I was simply knocked aside, and they rushed over and passed me without doing me injury. I lay until all of them had rushed out, and then rising, drew my claymore and joined in the fray."

"You were lucky, Roderick. But now for the search." As he spoke the old man turned and entered the cave, accompanied by the Witch of Ben-Lair and Gordon, and followed by the rest of the clansmen.

The cavern seemed to be divided into two portions, the entrance to the one on the right hand presenting itself immediately upon the place being entered. Into this, which was dimly lighted, the clansmen at once rushed in search of plunder; but the Chieftain, with Gordon and the Witch, having obtained possession of a lamp to guide them, struck off in the other direction. This passage was of considerable length, and was narrow and tortuous, the floor being strewn with rough pieces of rock, making walking difficult. Cautiously they threaded their way along, neither of them speaking, until at length McLeod, who walked first and carried the light, stopped short and turned towards his companions with a puzzled expression.

He had reached the end of the passage, and had found no place where Hector was likely to be confined.

"You cannot have been mistaken," he gasped, regarding the Witch anxiously, his white lips trembling as he uttered the words.

"No," was the reply; "we must search closer."

"Strange," muttered McLeod; "there seems to be no place of concealment leading from this."

"We might gie a bit halloo," suggested Gordon. "He may be within hearing distance an' us no aware o'd."

"We might try that," replied the Chieftain; then raising his voice, he cried out, "Hector—Hector McLeod!"

The sound filled the vaulted passage, and was re-echoed from every nook and cranny; but there was no response.

The old man shook his head sadly, and a tear dimmed his eye. He had entered the place with hope lightening his soul. Surely it was not to be quenched so soon, and his breast became the abode of despair.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "surely they cannot already have done the wicked deed."

The Witch of Ben-Lair looked troubled and sad, but was almost afraid to venture a reply.

"Lair's try a wee bit farther this way," suggested Gordon, turning and retracing his steps for some distance.

Mechanically the Chieftain followed him.

"Are you there, Hector McLeod?" shouted the Lowlander, the volume of sound from his stentorian lungs almost causing the rocks to start from their places.

Eagerly they listened for a response. It came. The voice of Hector McLeod was heard in reply—

"Is it you, Ned Gordon? Thank God, I am safe."

"My son! my Hector!" shouted the old man, in an ecstasy of joyful excitement. "Where are you? where are you?"

But the answer was a loud shout which Gordon raised at the same moment. He had discovered the entrance to the spot where Hector lay. Seizing the old man by the arm, he dragged him into the aperture which was now to be seen in the side of the passage, and from which the Lowlander had just uttered a piece of rock, and in a second more they had entered a gloomy, dingy hole, followed by the Witch of Ben-Lair.

A dark object lay on the floor before them, and flashing the light upon it, there was discovered young McLeod lying bound.

"Saved, saved! Thank Heaven, I am saved!" exclaimed the young man, as he recognised those who had arrived.

The heart of old McLeod bounded with joy when he saw his son again before him safe and unharmed.

"Yes, my son, you are saved," he exclaimed, stooping down and covering with his claymore the ropes which bound him; "and McLeods is this time baffled. Let us accept it as a good omen, promising safety and success in the future."

"But how did you discover me?" inquired our hero, rising to his feet and attempting to exercise his benumbed and stiffened limbs by walking. Then his eyes alighting on the old woman, he exclaimed in surprise, "Who is this?"

"This," replied his father, "is the woman who guided us to this place. You may have heard of her—the Witch of Ben-Lair."

"Ha! now I remember," exclaimed Hector, turning to the Witch. "You it was who met us in the glen while I was being conveyed a prisoner to Mairabha's Bann."

"The same," was the reply.

"But oh, can you remember the night of Miss Macgregor, the last time I was a prisoner along with me by removed a prisoner?"

"Any of us can remember the old woman. She is the same."

"In Castle Macgregor, I was imprisoned. Then, I was taken to her whom I remember, and I thank you for the information from her how she has power?"

"Yes, she has power."

"Continue."

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These were bought in Germany by a Dominion Emigration Agent, and will be offered by us retail at wholesale prices.

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