

The  
Inglenook

## FIONA M'IVER.

A ROMANCE OF THE WESTERN ISLES.

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### CHAPTER II.

(Continued.)

The conversation was now interrupted by the stopping of the carriage. Lachlan M'Cuaig was waiting on the edge of the wood with the dogs.

'Ah, well,' said Fergus Duff, 'we'll say no more about it at present. Only there's an old saying, "all's fair in love and war," and I'm not sure what my son would do if he were pressed.'

Nial Mor took his gun in an angry mood and descended from the carriage. His father was driven home.

Fiona had visited her old nurse, and was on her way back to the boat. Luath, relieved of the basket, was running hither and thither chasing the rabbits, and generally enjoying himself. The day was still bright and warm, and having plenty of time, Fiona made a detour to obtain a better view of the loch and surrounding mountains.

She was now descending a glen, the sides of which were thickly overgrown with stunted oaks and low bushes of various description. Huge boulders lay scattered about in all directions.

Then it occurred to her that in taking this path to the shore she was passing over a corner of the Sruthran estate. She was vexed with herself at not having thought of that before, and quickened her steps. It was, however, not far to the sea, and through an open space she saw Ronald Campbell with the boat, and gave him a sign of recognition.

Immediately after, a rabbit started almost from beneath her feet, and scudded away to its burrow. It made her think of Luath, who had disappeared from her side. Where was he? It would never do to permit him to run about freely on Mr. Duff's grounds. Lachlan M'Cuaig waged a ruthless war against all strange dogs.

At that moment a gun was fired among the thick undergrowth, a dog's piercing yelp rent the air, and poor Luath came in sight, wounded, limping and bleeding.

Fiona cried out and sprang forward; but simultaneously Nial Mor, his features red with anger, broke through the bushes, and without noticing who was advancing towards him, raised his gun, and with another heart-rending yelp of agony, Luath rolled over and lay stretched dead upon the ground.

For a second Fiona and Nial confronted one another in speechless astonishment. Then as the sportsman came forward full of shame and remorse, the girl's eyes flashed fire, and she spurned his apologies with disdain.

'You're a coward, Nial,' she cried. 'A base, heartless coward; how dare you shoot my dog?'

'Oh, Fiona, I can't tell you how sorry I am,' he answered in deep contrition. 'I had no idea the dog was yours. I wouldn't have shot it for the world if I had known.'

'You're a cruel tyrant, or you wouldn't have raised your gun against the harmless animal.'

'Believe me,' he replied in genuine distress, 'it was altogether a mistake. I never was more sorry about anything in my life.'

Fiona gave him a proud, disdainful look, and bent over the lifeless body without another word.

'Let me carry him for you,' he said, handing his gun to Lachlan M'Cuaig. 'How did you come here, so many miles from home? Which way are you going? I never dreamt of meeting you this morning.'

'Leave me,' she replied contemptuously. 'You shall not touch my dog with your murderous hands. You've done a deed that will never be blotted out of my memory.'

'This is terrible,' he answered. 'Will you not believe me, Fiona, when I assure you that I'm as much grieved at my thoughtless folly as ever you can be.'

'Then go away,' she said fiercely. 'Here comes Ronald Campbell, he'll carry Luath to the boat.'

Her eyes filled with tears, but she dashed them aside, determined that Nial should see no signs of weakness in her. Ronald had heard the report of the gun and the dog's yelp, and fearing what had happened, had hastily moored the boat, and come to Miss M'Iver's assistance.

Nial Mor was not willing to leave; he stood perplexed and irresolute, trying to think of something to say which would propitiate the girl. Again he bent down as though he would fain assist Ronald. Fiona motioned him away imperiously.

'I'm waiting for you to leave, Mr. Duff,' she said with chilling severity.

The blood rushed to his face, and without another word he turned and departed.

Then Ronald lifted up poor Luath, who had come in the midst of his happy gambols to so untimely an end, and bore him to the boat.

### CHAPTER III.

NIAL MOR'S NIGHT RIDE.

Nial Mor walked home with a troubled mind. Wave after wave of passion—anger, pride, remorse, love, raged within him, until he seemed like one distraught.

His handsome countenance grew dark as he recalled the epithets Fiona had flung at him. From any other lips they would have produced irreconcilable antagonism and hatred. Against her, however, his anger quickly subsided and turned upon himself.

'You're a fool, Nial Mor,' he muttered bitterly; 'a hasty, hot-headed fool. The dog was doing no harm, and but for your insane temper you would have met Fiona under the happiest circumstances. Only yesterday her father said that all would come right with a little tact. Had it not been for this stupid blunder you might have been sitting with her in the "Fionnaghal" on your way to Fàs-Ghlac. Instead of that you've made the gulf wider than ever.'

As he mused thus, he hastened on with downcast looks, cursing his unlucky stars.

The untoward event, however, had no effect on his passion for Fiona, unless to kindle it to a greater flame. Above all his vexation and self-reproach there rose the vision of the proud, beautiful girl as she confronted him with flashing eyes. Never had he felt her so entirely worth winning as when she stood pouring on him her indig-

nation and scorn.

'Splendid, high-spirited girl?' he thought. 'She even dared to call me a coward and a tyrant. But I'm no coward,' he muttered with a bitter laugh; 'and as to a tyrant—well, heaven knows I'm ready to be her slave.'

On one thing he was resolved—he would never give Fiona up. Win her he must and would. It would be more difficult now, but that there had arisen any insuperable obstacle to the realisation of his desire, he could not believe.

Considering what had happened, he recalled his father's remarks about Torquil M'Iver's affairs with a grim smile of satisfaction. If the worst came to the worst, Fiona and her father were in his power. She could not refuse him now. Of course there would be no need to use that power tyrannically. Fiona should be won by magnanimity, of which he would soon give proof. Yet, such are the contradictions of the heart of man—his father's hint about the bonds no longer appeared to him quite so atrocious.

And so he approached his home in a fairly optimistic mood.

At the castle gate he met the doctor departing from a visit to his father.

'Ah, guid mornin' to ye,' said Dr. Mackenzie, reining in his horse. He was a short, thick-set, dark-whiskered man, hailing from Glasgow, and loved to affect broad Scotch. 'Ye luik brow an' weel, an' richt glad I am to see ye.'

'Thank you, doctor, time also deals gently with you,' answered Nial, shaking hands. 'You don't look a day older than when I saw you last. What do you think of my father this morning?'

'I'm thinkin' he'll hae to gang south,' said the doctor seriously. 'In fac', I tell him to sen' for ye, sae that ye micht tak' him awa'.'

'Why, doctor, I thought that idea was abandoned. He has seemed ever so much better since I returned. He was saying so only this morning.'

'Na, na, it's only temporary. He mairun gang to the south o' England. Get him awa' while this guid weather lasts, or I'll no answer for the consequences.'

'And what does he say about it?'

'He's willin', he's willin', an' ye maun encourage him—his life depends on't,' replied the doctor, moving on. 'I'll be back the morn, an' ye maun leave as sune as possible.'

When Nial Mor entered the castle he found preparations already proceeding with a view to their departure. The doctor had business requiring early attention in Oban, and proposed, for the sake of his patient, to travel with him so far. He expected to be able to start in two or three days at the latest.

Whether Fergus Duff would have consented to this hurried movement had he favoured his son's wishes regarding Fiona is doubtful. No one could ever be sure of what was passing in his scheming brain, and this sudden willingness to comply with advice which he had previously opposed might not be unconnected with the conversation already recorded.