

A Scottish Vendetta.

CHAPTER XI.

CATHERINE M'LEOD AND THE CHIEF OF THE CLAN
—DONALD CAMERON VISITS THE CASTLE—
HIS PROPOSAL IS REJECTED—A CRITICAL
MEETING—NED GORDON AGAIN OF SERVICE.
"Exactly," he responded. "The nature of the communication I reserved for your own ears, and we shall come to the point at once. I suppose you may recollect a time when I was a suitor for your sister's hand?"

An expression of annoyance crossed the old man's face, and he dryly replied "I do."
"I thought so. Well, you may also recollect that when that lady refused my offer, and you, acting upon her suggestion, ordered me to leave this castle, I informed you that I was not inclined to consider the negotiations conclusively broken off."

"But what has that to do with my son?"
"Patience, and you shall hear all. Of course if you do not care for the information of which I am possessed you have but to intimate so and I will at once take my departure, though you might ultimately come to regret it."

"Proceed—proceed."
"Well, you may be assured that I took the first opportunity that presented itself to implement my promise. But before proceeding further, may I ask whether you were aware of your son's destination when he left the Castle of M'Leod?"

"I have no idea of where he went."
"And did you know nothing of his errand?"

"I have learned what it was."
"Let me tell you then,"—and Cameron made a show of indignation—"that he came to Droghdaire, and, clandestinely meeting, induced my niece, Miss Flora Macgregor, to fly with him against my consent."

"Did my son that?" asked the old man, in amazement.
"That he did; and, had I not pursued them and overtaken them at Kinloch-Ewe, it would be difficult to say what the consequences might have been. Well,—and now I approach my true errand—when Hector M'Leod had shown such an attitude to me I considered myself justified in holding him in my power, and at once took him prisoner."

"Well?"
"Well, I have come to negotiate about the giving of him up."

"Why come to me? Could you not obtain his own word that he would not repeat the prank?"

"I might, but I did not desire that, I desired more," was the grim reply. M'Leod darted a searching glance at Cameron as he asked—

"What more was it you desired—what more had you a right to?"
"I desired your sister's hand, and in the meantime might be right—and I have the right."

M'Leod now clearly understood the relationship between himself and Cameron. They had met as enemies, not with any degree of friendship. But though the position in which he found himself staggered him for a moment, he kept outwardly calm, and merely put the question—

"How do I know that what you told me is true? How do I know that Hector persuaded your niece to fly with him, or even that my son is in your power?"
"I shall give you an answer to the most important part of your query," replied Cameron, a fiendish smile lighting up his countenance. "Do you recognize this?"—pulling Hector's letter from his pocket and handing it to M'Leod.

With trembling fingers the old man seized the note. A single glance at the handwriting told him that it was his son's, and it was not without much agitation that he scanned it.

"And so my son agrees with the request you mean to propose, and which you have already indicated?" he said, after he had read it several times through.

"He does."
"And what if I refuse?"
"Hector M'Leod dies."

"Ha! bold words these. What if I make Donald Cameron prisoner now?"
"Hector M'Leod will die if I return not within forty-eight hours, so you have very little time to prepare your answer."

Cameron spoke with a deep, determined accent.
"Is Hector at Droghdaire?"
"That question can only be answered after you have consented that Anne M'Leod shall be my wife."

Old M'Leod was silent for a few minutes, during which Cameron keenly regarded him. Suddenly he arose, and stepping up to where Cameron was seated, he exclaimed indignantly—

"Donald Cameron, I am an old man now, and doubtless my heart is softer than it has been. This is true; and it is also true that my affection for my son is very great, and to lose him would be a blow almost, if not altogether, overpowering; but still I value honour too much to be coerced into an arrangement of the kind you propose, let the sacrifice be what it may; and there, where you sit, man, I tell you I consider you a villain and a coward, otherwise you would not act as you have done. I have only to say you have mistaken your man; you might have known me better."

"Beware of your words, Malcolm M'Leod," shouted Cameron, also springing to his feet. "Beware! lest I take the opportunity I have of avenging myself upon your house for insults already offered me, without giving you a chance to interfere."

"By the sky above me, Donald Cameron, dare to utter such words again, and my claymores will drink your blood!"
As he spoke, M'Leod's form reared itself with indignation until the old man looked magnificent with his proud mien and flashing eyes.

But Cameron had stepped too far, and he saw his error. True, he desired the death of young M'Leod; but his death would be valueless only if he were successful with his other object—the obtaining of Anne M'Leod's hand. That was his chief object, and to that end he must work.

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Guelph, Oct. 11, 1873

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