

BLACK WILLIAM

DONALD ROSS OF
HEIMRA (VOLUME 1 OF
3)

William Black

**Donald Ross of Heimra
(Volume 1 of 3)**

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CHAPTER I. GODIVA

"Well, Mary, it is a pretty plaything to have given you – a Highland estate! – and no doubt all your fine schemes will come right. But you will have to change three things first."

"Yes?"

"And these are human nature and the soil and climate of Scotland."

"Avaunt, Mephistopheles! – and go and give that porter a shilling."

The two speakers were on the platform of Invershin station, on the Highland line of railway. One of them was a tall young woman of distinguished presence and somewhat imperious carriage, as you could gather at a first glance; but the next second, if she happened to turn her face towards you, you would have perceived that her expression meant nothing but a bland gentleness and a prevailing and excellent good-humour. Perhaps it was the dimple in her cheek that did it – a dimple that came there readily whenever she regarded any one, and that seemed to say she was very willing to be pleased and to please: at all events, she found it easy, or had hitherto found it easy, to make friends. For the rest, she was of an erect and elegant figure; her complexion fair; her eyes grey-green, and full of light; her abundant hair of a sunny brown; her features regular enough and fine enough for all practical purposes. It was of this young woman that her friend and now her travelling companion, Kate Glendinning, was in the habit of saying —

"There's one thing I will confess about Mary Stanley: she's not quite honest. She is too happy. She is so happy in herself that she wants every one she meets to share in her content; and she is apt to say clever and flattering little things that are not quite true. It is for no selfish purpose; quite the reverse: still – you mustn't believe all that Mary says to you."

Thus Kate Glendinning of her dearest friend; but if any one else had ventured to say similar things in her presence – then, and right swiftly, there would have been pretty tempests and flashes of eye-lightning.

And now there came up to Miss Stanley a short, stumpy, red-haired and red-bearded man of extraordinary breadth of shoulder and bulk of frame. He had a massive head despite his diminutive height; his mouth, drawn heavily down at each end, betokened a determined will, not to say a dogged obstinacy; and his small, clear, blue eyes, besides being sharp and intelligent, had a curious kind of cold aggressiveness in them – that is to say, when he was not talking to one whom it was his interest to propitiate, for then he could assume a sort of clumsy humility, both in manner and speech. This was Mr. David Purdie, solicitor, of Inverness. *An Troich Bheag Dhearg* – that is to say, the Little Red Dwarf – the people out at Lochgarra called him; but Mr. Purdie did not know that.

"The carriage is quite ready, Miss Stanley," said he, in his slow, deliberate, south-country accent; and therewithal the three of them passed round to the back of the station and entered the waggonette, Mr. Purdie modestly taking a seat by the driver. The two young ladies were well wrapped up, for it was in the beginning of April, and they had fifty miles before them, out to the Atlantic coast. Kate Glendinning, in looking after her companion's abundant furs and rugs, rather affected to play the part of maid; for this shrewd and sensible lass, who was in rather poor circumstances, had consented to accept a salary from her friend who was so much better off; and she performed her various self-imposed duties with a tact and discretion beyond all praise.

And as they drove away on this clear-shining afternoon, Mary Stanley's face was something to study. She was all eagerness and impatience; the colour mantled in her cheeks; her brain was so busy that she had scarcely a word for her neighbour. For she had heard a good deal and read much more, in Parliamentary debates and elsewhere, of the sufferings of the crofters, of the iniquities that had been practised on them by tyrannical landlords and factors, of the lamentations of the poor homeless ones thrust forth from their native shores; and now, in this little bit of the world that had so unexpectedly become hers, and in as far as she was able, wrong was to be put right, amends were to be made, and peace and amity, and comfort and prosperity were to be established for ever and ever. Perhaps the transcendental vision of the prophet Isaiah was hunting her: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad ... and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." And if she were to summon back the poor exiles who had been banished – banished to the slums of Glasgow, perchance, or to the far plains of Manitoba?.. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and ever-lasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." To be sure, as they now drove along the wide and fertile valley that is penetrated by the Kyle of Sutherland, she did not meet with much evidence of the destitution she had been led to expect. She had heard of bleak wastes and sterile altitudes, of ruined huts and dismantled steadings; but here, under the softly-wooded hills, were long and level stretches of arable land, the ploughmen busy at their work; the occasional crofts were very far indeed from being hovels; and the people whom they saw, in the bits of gardens, or tending the cattle, looked well-clothed and well-fed. She ventured to hint something of this to her companion; and Kate, glancing at her, began to giggle.

"I really believe you are disappointed, Mary! Is there not enough misery for you? But never fear. If it's misery you're in search of, you have seldom far to go for it, in this world. Only I must tell you this – if you're so eager to relieve distress – that there is more of wretchedness, and crime, and squalor, and piteous human suffering in a single square mile of the slums of London or New York than you'll find in the whole of the Highlands of Scotland."

"That may be," said Miss Stanley, in her calm and equable fashion. "But you see, Käthchen, I have no call that way. I do not feel a direct responsibility, as I do in this case —

"It is a responsibility you are making for yourself," her friend said. "You know very well it was not for that your uncle left you the property. It was merely to spite your father and your brothers."

"There was a little more," was the good-natured reply (for she did not seem to resent this reference to her amiable relative). "I think it was to spite the people out there as well. My uncle and they never could get on; and he was not a man who liked to be thwarted. And of course he imagined that I, being a woman, would not interfere; that I would leave the estate to be managed by Mr. Purdie, and simply receive the rents. Well," she continued, and here she lowered her voice somewhat, and there was a touch of colour in her face that was perhaps the expression of some definite resolve, "I may allow Mr. Purdie to manage the estate, or I may not. But if he does continue to manage the estate, it will be under my direction."

Käthchen looked at her, and laughed a little.

"I don't think Mr. Purdie knows whom he has got to deal with," said she, under her breath.

They stopped that night at Oykel Bridge. Miss Stanley invited Mr. Purdie to dine with them; but he declined on the ground that he had business in the neighbourhood – an odd excuse, for the inn and its dependencies constitute the remote little hamlet. The two young women passed the evening by themselves, and talked: the one with generous ardour entering into all her wonderful schemes, the other (who knew the country, and the people) interposing now and again with a little modifying information. But really Käthchen was not unsympathetic. Her eyes, which were the attractive feature of her face, sometimes expressed a trifle of demure amusement; but she was not a quarrelsome or argumentative creature; and besides there is something about all fine humanitarian projects that one would rather believe in and welcome.

Next morning they resumed their drive, and very soon entered a much wilder country than that of the preceding day. Wilder but nevertheless beautiful – with its range upon range of russet hills, wine-stained here and there with shadow; its woods of leafless birch of a soft dark rose-lilac; its long undulations of waste moorland, yellow and brown; with now and again the sudden blue scythe-sweep of the river. For now they were traversing the lonely district of upper Strath-Oykel. Far ahead of them rose the giant bulk of Ben More, Assynt, its higher shoulders a solid mass of white. The sunlight around them was cheerful, no doubt; and yet there was a strange sense of solitariness, of voicelessness; and Mary, who was less concerned about the beauty of the landscape than about certain problems haunting her mind, called out to Mr. Purdie, who was again up beside the driver —

"Mr. Purdie, why are there no people living in this country?"

"Because there's nothing for them to live on," was the laconic answer. "It's fit for nothing but grazing sheep – and for grouse."

"Yes – the hills, perhaps," said she. "But look along the valley – by the side of the river."

"Ay, it's fine land, that," said he, grimly, – "for a wheen pesewepes!" And indeed the plovers were the only visible living things, jerking about in the air, dipping suddenly to the ground and swiftly rising again, with their curious squeaking call, and the soft velvet fluffing of their wings.

However, all that was nothing. By and by they had left the Oykel strath, and had entered upon a far higher and bleaker region, the desolation of which appalled her. There was not even the solitary shepherd's cottage they had seen down in the other valley; here was nothing but a wilderness of brown and ragged moorland, with deep black clefts of peat, and an occasional small tarn, without a bush along its shores, its waters driven a deep blue by the wind. Away in the west they could make out the spectral shapes of the Assynt mountains – Coul Beg, Coul More, and Suilven – remote and visionary through the universal haze of the heather-burning; but here, all around them, were these endless and featureless and melancholy undulations; and the silence was now unbroken even by the curious bleating of the plovers: once, and once only, they heard the hoarse and distant croak of a raven.

"Käthchen," said Mary, in a sort of piteous dismay, as she looked abroad over those sombre solitudes, "you have been all along the Ross and Cromarty coast; is it like *that*?"

"Plenty of it is worse," was the reply.

"And – and – my place: is it like that?"

"I have never been in to Lochgarra."

"But – but if it is like that – what am I to do for my people?"

"The best you can," said Käthchen, cheerfully.

It seemed an interminable drive. And then, in the afternoon, a premature darkness came slowly over; the mountains in the north gradually receded out of sight; and heavy, steady rain began to fall. The two girls sat huddled underneath one umbrella, listening to the pattering footfalls of the horses and the grinding of the wheels on the road; and when they ventured to peep forth from their shelter they beheld but the same monotonous features in the landscape: masses of wet rock and dark russet heather, black swamps, low and bare hills, and now and again the grey glimmer of a stream or tarn. It was a cheerless outlook; continually changing, and yet ever the same; and hour after hour the rain came down wearily. There was hardly a word said between those two: whither had fled Mary Stanley's dreams of a shining blue sea, a sunny coastline, and a happy peasantry busy in their fields and gardens, their white cottages radiant in the morning light? Käthchen, on the other hand, was inclined to laugh ruefully.

"Isn't it a good thing, Mary, that duty brought us here? If it had been pleasure, we should be calling ourselves awful fools."

But quite of a sudden this hopeless resignation vanished, and a wild excitement took its place.

"Miss Stanley," Mr. Purdie called to her, "we've come to the march."

"The what?"

"The march – the boundary of your estate."

Instantly she had the carriage stopped, and nothing would do but that she must get out and set foot on her own land: moreover, when Kätchen took down the umbrella, they found that the rain had ceased, and that the western skies were lightening somewhat.

"That is the march," said Mr. Purdie, pointing to a low, irregular, moss-grown wall – obviously a very ancient landmark; "and it goes right over the hill and down again to the Garra."

Leaving the highway, she stepped across the ditch, and stood on the moist, soft peat land.

"And this is mine!" she said to Kätchen, with an odd expression of face. "This is absolutely mine. Nobody can dispute my possession of it. This piece of the solid world actually belongs to me."

"And I suppose your rights extend as deep as ever you like," said Kätchen. "You might go all the way through, and have a walk in the streets of Melbourne, and get dry, and come back."

But Mary's quick eye had caught sight of what was to her the most important feature of the surrounding landscape. It was a cottage perched on a knoll above a burn – or, rather, it was the ruins of a cottage, the gables standing roofless, the thatch long ago blown away by the winds, the beams and fallen stones lying among the withered nettles, altogether a melancholy sight.

"Now, isn't it shameful!" she exclaimed, in hot indignation. "Look at that! The very first thing I meet with! Do you wonder that people should talk about the Highland landlords? Some poor wretch has been driven away – perhaps at this very moment, in Canada or in Australia, he is thinking of the old home, and forgetting all the rain and discomfort there used to be, Mr. Purdie!"

"Yes, ma'am?" said he, coming a bit nearer; and Kätchen looked on, wondering if his doom was about to be pronounced.

"Who lived in that house?" Miss Stanley demanded.

"The schoolmaster," was the reply.

"The schoolmaster? And where is he now?"

"He's in his own house," the factor said. "We built him a new one and a better one, to be nearer the school and the village; and when he moved it was hardly worth while keeping the old one in repair."

"Oh," said she, a little disconcerted. "Oh, really. Then no one was sent away – from that cottage?"

"No, no – not at all – not at all," said he; and he followed her to the waggonette and politely shut the door after her – while Kätchen's face maintained an admirable gravity.

As the drove on again, the afternoon seemed inclined to clear; the skies were banking up; and there were faint streaks of lemon-yellow among the heavy purple clouds in the west. And very soon the road made a sweep to the left, bringing them in sight of the Connan, a small but turbulent tributary of the Garra. Here, also, they encountered the first signs of the habitations of men – little clumps of buildings clustered together just over a stretch of flat land that had clearly been recovered from the river-bed. Crofts, no doubt: each slated cottage surrounded by its huddled dependency of thatched barns and byres.

As the waggonette drew near to the first of these rude little settlements, the women disappeared into the outhouses, and the children hid behind the peat-stack; but there remained standing at the door of the cottage an elderly man, who regarded the strangers with a grave and perhaps rather sullen curiosity.

"Mr. Purdie," said Mary, in an undertone, "is that one of my tenants?"

"Yes, certainly – that is James Macdonald."

"I wish to make his acquaintance," said she; and she stopped the carriage, and got out.

There was no sort of fear, or unnecessary bashfulness, about this young woman. She walked right up the bank to the door of the cottage. The short thick-set man standing there had something of a Russian cast of countenance, with a heavy grey beard, shaggy eyebrows, and small, suspicious eyes. His clothes were weather-worn as to colour and much mended; but they were not in the least squalid; and he had a red woollen comforter round his neck.

"Good evening!" said she, with a most winning smile.

But the propitiating dimple, that had hitherto been all-conquering, was of no avail here. He looked at her. He did not raise his cap.

"*Cha 'n 'eil beurla agam,*" said he, with a sort of affected indifference.

She was taken aback only for a moment.

"What does he say?" she asked of Mr. Purdie, who had followed her.

"He says he has no English," the factor answered; and then he added, vindictively: "But he would have plenty of English if he wanted to tell you of his grievances – oh, ay, plenty! Start him on that, and he'll find plenty of English! He's one of the most ill-condeetioned men in the whole place – and I suppose he has enough English to understand that!"

"Tell him who I am," said she, rather disappointedly; for she had set out with the determination to get to know all the circumstances and wants and wishes of her tenants, especially of the poorer ones, without the intervention of any factor.

Hereupon Mr. Purdie, in unnecessarily severe tones, as it seemed to her, addressed a few sentences in Gaelic to the stubborn-looking old man, who, in turn – and with no abatement of his hostile attitude – replied in the same tongue. But to Mary's surprise, he suddenly added – fixing morose eyes upon her —

"She – no my laird! Ross of Heimra – my laird. Young Donald – he my laird. She no my laird at ahl!"

"Oh, but that is absurd, you know," Mary said, eagerly, and with a quick delight that she could enter into direct communication with him. "You forget – you are mistaken – my uncle bought the estate from the late Mr. Ross of Heimra. Surely you understand that? Surely you know that? The whole place was bought in open market. Mr. Ross sold the land, and all the rights belonging to it – yes, and the obligations, too; and my uncle bought it. Don't you understand?"

The man turned away his eyes, and sulkily muttered something in Gaelic.

"What is it?" asked Mary, compelled to appeal once more to the factor.

"Like the scoundrel's impertinence!" said the Little Red Dwarf, darting an angry look at the crofter. "He says the Englishman – that is your uncle, Miss Stanley – the Englishman bought the land but not the hearts of the people."

"And that is quite right!" Mary exclaimed. "That is quite right and true. Tell him I quite agree with him. But tell him this – tell him that if my uncle did not buy the hearts of the people, I mean to win them – "

"Oh, Mary," Käthchen struck in, rather shamefacedly, "don't talk like that! They won't understand you. Be practical. Ask him what complaint he has to make about his farm – ask him what he wants – "

"I can tell ye that beforehand!" said Mr. Purdie, in his irascible scorn. "He wants more arable land, and he wants more pasture; and both for nothing. And no doubt he would like a steam plough thrown in, and maybe a score or two o' black-faced wethers – "

But Mary interrupted. She had formed for herself some idea, before she came to this country, as to how she meant to proceed.

"Mr. Purdie," said she, in her clear, firm way, "I wish you to ask this man if he has anything to complain of; and I wish you to tell me precisely what he says."

The Troich Bheag Dhearg, being thus ordered, obeyed; but he scowled upon the stubborn crofter – and it was apparent there was no love lost on the other side either. At the end of their brief, and unwilling, conversation, the factor made his report.

"Well, there are many things he would like – who could doubt that? – but in especial he wants the pasture of Meall-na-Cruagan divided amongst the crofters of this district, and the tax for the dyke taken off the rent. But Meall-na-Cruagan never did belong to the crofters at any time; and it is part of Mr. Watson's sheep-farm – he has it under lease."

"I will look into that afterwards," said she. "What is the tax you mentioned?"

"Well, when the dyke along there – the embankment," said the factor, "was built to keep the river from flooding the land, the interest of the money expended was added on to the rents of the crofts, as was natural – and that's what they call a tax!"

"How long have they been paying that tax?" she asked.

"It is about thirty years since the dyke was built."

"Thirty years!" she said. "Thirty years! These poor people have been paying a tax all this time for an embankment built to improve the property? Really, Mr. Purdie! – "

"They get the value of it!" he said, as testily as he dared. "The land is no longer flooded – "

"Tell this man," said she, with some colour mounting to her face, "that the tax for the dyke is abolished – here and now!"

"Godiva!" said Käthchen, in an undertone, with a bit of a titter.

And the factor would have protested from his own point of view. But this young woman's heart was all aflame. She cared nothing for ridicule, nor for any sort of more practical opposition. Here was some definite wrong that she could put right. She did not want to hear from Mr. Purdie, or from anybody else, what neighbouring landlords might think, or what encouragement it might give the crofters to make other and more impossible demands.

"I don't care what other landlords may say!" said she with firm lips: "You tell me that I improve my property – and then charge these poor people with the cost! And for thirty years they have been paying? Well, I wish you to say to this man that the tax no longer exists – from this moment it no longer exists – it is not to be heard of again!"

The factor made a brief communication: the taciturn crofter answered not a word – not a word of recognition, much less of thanks. But Mary Stanley was not to be daunted by this incivility: as she descended to the waggonette, her face wore a proud look – right and justice should be done, as far as she was able, in this her small sphere: the rest was with the gods.

And again they drove on; but now was there not some subtle softening of the air, some moist odour as of the sea, some indication of the neighbourhood of the Atlantic shores? Clearly they were getting down to the coast. And unhappily, as they went on, the land around them seemed to be getting worse and worse – if there could be a worse. A wilderness of crags and knolls – of Hebridean gneiss mostly; patches of swamp, with black gullies of peat; sterile hills that would have threatened a hoodie crow with starvation: such appeared to be Miss Stanley's newly found property. But a very curious incident now occurred to withdraw her attention from these immediate surroundings – an incident the meaning of which she was to learn subsequently. They had come in sight of a level space that had evidently at one time been a lake, but was now a waste of stones, with a touch of green slime and a few withered rushes here and there; and in the middle of this space, on a mound that had apparently been connected with the mainland, was a heap of scattered blocks that looked like the tumbled-down ruins of some ancient fort.

"What is that, Mr. Purdie?" she called out, still anxious for all possible information.

A malignant grim came over the face of the Little Red Dwarf.

"That," said he, "was once Castle Heimra; and then it was Castle Stanley; and now it is nothing!"

He had scarcely uttered the words when the driver slashed at the neck of one of the horses; and both animals sprung forward with a jerk – a jerk so sudden and violent that Mr. Purdie was nearly pitched headlong from his seat. He threw a savage glance at the driver; but he dared not say anything – the two ladies were within hearing. Later on that evening Mary recalled this little incident – and seemed to understand.

Behold, at last, the sea! – a semi-circular bay sheltered by long black headlands; beyond that the wide grey plain, white-tipped with flashing and hurrying waves; and out towards the horizon a small but precipitous island, a heavy surge springing high along its southern crags. But she had time only for the briefest glance, for here was the village – her own village! – with its smithy, its schoolroom, its inn, its grocery store that was also a post-office, and thereafter a number of not very picturesque

cottages scattered about amid bits of poor garden, just above the shore. Nay, at the same moment she caught sight of Lochgarra House – her home that was to be: an odd-looking building that seemed half a jail and half a baronial castle, but was prettily situated among some larch-woods on a promontory on the other side of the bay. Of course they had driven through the little township almost directly; and now she could turn to the sea again – that looked strangely mournful and distant in the wan twilight.

"But where's the yacht?" she exclaimed.

"What yacht?" her companion asked, with some surprise.

"Why, the yacht I saw a minute ago – just before we came to the village: it was out yonder – close to the island – "

"Oh, nonsense, Mary!" said Kate Glendinning. "You may have seen a fishing-smack, or a lobster-boat – but a yacht at this time of the year! – "

"I declare to you I saw a yacht – for I noticed how white the sails were, even in the twilight," Mary insisted; and then she appealed to the factor: "Mr. Purdie, didn't you see a yacht out there a minute or two ago?"

"No, I did not," he made answer; and then he in his turn addressed the driver: "Did you, John?"

"No," said the driver, looking straight ahead of him, and with a curiously impassive expression of face – an expression of face that convinced Mr. Purdie, who was prone to suspicion, that the man had lied.

It was a kind of bewilderment to her, this taking possession: the going up the wide stone steps, the gazing round the lofty oak hall, the finding herself waited upon by those shy-eyed soft-spoken Highland maids. But when she was in the retirement of her own room, whither she had been accompanied by the faithful Kate, one thing stood out clear to her mind from amid all the long day's doings.

"Käthchen," said she – and she was pacing up and down the room – or going from window to window without looking out – as was some-times her habit when she was excited – "I mean to have my own way in this. It is not enough that the tax should be abolished – it is not enough. No doubt those poor people were saved from the risk of floods; but on the other hand the property was permanently improved; and it is monstrous that they should be expected to go on paying for ever. I tell you they have paid too much already; and I mean to see things made right. What do I care for Mr. Purdie, or the neighbouring landlords? If Mr. Purdie has any business to talk of when he comes along this evening – well, my little piece of business must take precedence. I am going to give Mr. Purdie the first of his instructions."

She paused for a second – and then she spoke with rather a proud and determined air: "Fifteen years of that tax to be remitted and returned!"

"Godiva!" said Käthchen, again; but there was not much sarcasm in her smiling eyes.

CHAPTER II. YOUNG DONALD

"And if I am not the laird," said Miss Stanley, as the three of them took their places at table – for Mr. Purdie had accepted an invitation, and had come along from the inn to dine with the two young ladies – "if I am not the laird, I want to know who is the laird: I mean, I want to know all about my rival. What was it the stubborn old crofter called him? Young Donald – Young Ross of Heimra – well, tell me all about him, Mr. Purdie!"

But to Mary's surprise, the Little Red Dwarf remained sternly mute. Yet there was no one in the room besides themselves except the maid who was waiting at table – a tall and good-looking Highland lass, whose pretty way of speech, and gentle manner, and shy eyes had already made a pleasant impression on her young mistress. All the same, the factor remained silent until the girl had gone.

"I would just advise ye, Miss Stanley," said he, rather moderating his voice, which ordinarily was inclined to be aggressive and raucous, "I would just advise ye to have a care what ye say before these people. They're all in a pact; and they're sly and cunning – just beyond belief; ay, and ready to do ye a mischief, the thravn ill-willed creatures!"

"Oh, Mr. Purdie!" Mary protested, in her good-humoured way, "you mustn't try to prejudice me like that! I have already had a little talk with Barbara; and I could not but think of what Dr. Johnson said – that every Highland girl is a gentlewoman."

"And not a word they utter is to be believed – no, not with a Bible in their hands," the factor went on, in spite of her remonstrance. "Miss Stanley, did ye hear me ask the driver as we came through the village if he had seen the yacht out by Heimra island – the yacht that ye saw with your own eyes? He said no – he had not seen it – and I knew by his face he was lying to me."

"But, Mr. Purdie," said Mary, again, "you did not see the yacht either. And I may have been mistaken."

"Ye were not mistaken," said the factor, with vicious emphasis. "For well I know what that was. That was nothing else than young Ross coming back from one of his smuggling expeditions – the thieving, poaching scoundrel! – and little thinking that I would be coming out to Lochgarra this very afternoon. But I'll be even with my gentleman yet! – for it's all done to thwart me – it's all done to thwart me –"

The factor's small clear eyes sparkled with malice; but he had perforce to cease speaking, for at this moment Barbara came into the room. When she had gone again, he resumed:

"I will just tell ye how I came to get on his track," Mr. Purdie said, with something of a triumphant air. "And first of all ye must understand, Miss Stanley, I take some little credit to myself for having routed out the illicit stills in this country-side; ay, I'm thinking they're pretty well cleared out now; indeed I'll undertake to say there's not a hidden worm-tub or a mash tun within twenty miles around. There was some trouble; oh, yes; for they're cunning creatures; and they stand by one another in lying and concealment; but I managed to get some information for the Preventive Staff all the same – from time to time, that was – and then I had a good knowledge o' the place – ye see, Miss Stanley, I was factor at Lochgarra before your uncle gave me back my post again; and so, with keeping the gaugers busy, we got at one after another of the black bothies, as they call them, until I doubt whether there's a *bothan dubh* between here and Strathcarron. Yes, I may admit I take some credit for that. I've heard folk maintain that speerits are a necessary of life in a bad climate like this; but what I say is, let people pay their rent before comforting themselves wi' drams. My business is with the rent. I'm not a doctor. Temperance, ay, and even total abstinence, is a fine thing for everybody."

"Won't you help yourself, Mr. Purdie?" said Kate Glendinning, with grave eyes, and she pushed the sherry decanter towards him. Mr. Purdie filled his glass – for the fifth time – and drained it off. Then he proceeded.

"However, this is my story. One day I had finished wi' my business here, and had set out to ride over to Ledmore, when the toothache came into my head just terrible, and I was like to be driven mad. I was passing Cruagan at the time – where ye spoke to James Macdonald, Miss Stanley – indeed, it was at James's house I stopped, and tied up the beast, and went in to see if I could get a drop of whiskey to put in the side of my cheek, for the pain was just fearful. Well, there was nobody in but James's old mother – an old, old woman – she could hardly move away from the fire – and says I, 'For God's sake, woman, give me some whiskey to drive away this pain.' Of course she declared and better declared there was none in the house; but at last, seeing I was near out o' my senses, she hobbled away and brought me – what do ye think? – a glass of brandy – and fine brandy, too. 'Hallo!' says I to the old cailleach, when the brandy had burned in my mouth for a while, and the pain was not so bad, 'where did ye get this fine stuff?' Would ye believe it, she declared and better declared that she found it! 'Find it, woman! Where did ye find it?' But no; that was all; she had found it. And then I began to think. Where was an old woman like that to get brandy? So says I all of a sudden, 'This is smuggled stuff. Ye need not deny it; and unless ye tell me instantly where ye got it, and how ye got it, the Supervisor will be here to-morrow morning, and in twenty-four hours ye'll be in Dingwall Jail! – "'

"Mr. Purdie," said Kätchen, interrupting – and with rather a cold manner – "was that your return for the old woman's kindness to you in your trouble?"

But he did not heed the taunt. He was exulting in his having trapped his enemy.

"She was frightened out of her wits, the wretched old creature. 'Donuil Og,' she says – Young Donald – it was from young Ross that she had got it. And now the case was clear enough! I had been suspecting something of the kind. And here was a fine come-down for the Rosses of Heimra; – the Rosses of Heimra, that in former days made such a flourish at the English court – dancing at Almacks, and skelping about wi' the Prince Regent; and now the last of the family come down to selling smuggled brandy to old women and a parcel of crofters and cottars! A fine way of earning a living! But it's all he's fit for – an idle ne'er-do-weel, that never did a turn of work in his life beyond poaching and thieving and stirring up ill-will behind one's back. But I'll be even with my gentleman! I'll have the Supervisor of Excise on to him; his fine little trips to the Channel Islands – I suppose it's the Channel Islands, where you get brandy for next to nothing – we'll soon put a stop to them; and when he finds himself before the Sheriff at Dingwall, he'll be singing another tune!"

A tap at the door – then Barbara entered; and the factor looked up quickly and suspiciously. But if the tall Highland lass had been listening her face said nothing.

"And the young man you speak of," Mary asked, "does he live all by himself – out on that island?"

"It's fit that he should live by himself," said Mr. Purdie, with his eyes beginning to twinkle fiercely again: for any reference to this young man seemed to completely turn his head. "He's nothing but a savage – brought up as a savage – amongst the rocks and crags – like a wild-goat – from his earliest years. What else could ye expect? There was his mother – a proud woman – proud and vindictive as ever was born – and she hears how her husband is gallivanting from this capital to that – throwing away his money on Italian countesses and riff-raff – indeed there was the one public scandal, but I cannot give ye particulars, Miss Stanley, the story is not for a young lady's ears at all: but the mother, she determines to go away and live in that island, and bring up her only child there; and there the two o' them live, like two savages, the laddie growing up as a wild goat would, clambering about the rocks and the shore and the hills. What could ye expect but that he should turn out a poaching, thieving, smuggling rascal, especially with every man, woman, and child in the place – on the mainland here, I mean – ready to serve him and screen him? Truly it is a debasing thing to think of – such supersteetion; but these poor ignorant creatures – a name's enough for them – any

Ross of Heimra, because he's a Ross of Heimra, is a little God Almighty to them; I think they would perjure their immortal souls for that impudent and brazen-faced young scoundrel out there. Brandy? Oh, ay, brandy! And I dare say he gets them tobacco, too; and makes a good profit on't; for what else can he live on? Heimra island is the last of all their possessions; if you go scattering your money among Italian countesses, you've got to cut up the estate, and fling it into the market, bit by bit, until you come to the final solid lump of it – which your uncle bought, Miss Stanley; and then the deserted wife, left to herself on that island out there, can live on whelks and mussels if she likes! Well, a fine lonely place to nurse pride! Plenty of time to think! The great estate gone – her husband at length dead and buried without ever having come near her – and this young whelp to look after – a wild goat among the rocks! No more grandeur now – though at times Lord This or Lord That, or even a Duke or Duchess, would come in their steam-yacht, or send her presents of game in the autumn – "

"Poor woman!" said Mary. "Is she out there still?"

"No, no – her troubles are over," said the factor, with some expression of relief. "There's one the less for these ignorant, supersteetious creatures hereabouts to fall down and worship, as if they were golden images. She died near a year ago; and would ye believe it, this son o' hers, instead of having her put into a Christian graveyard, had her buried on the western coast of the island, up on the top of the cliff, and there's a great white marble slab there, that ye might see for miles off. A nice kind of thing, that! Refusing Christian burial for his own mother! He's just a Pagan, neither more nor less – a wild savage – fearing neither God nor man – getting drunk every night, I'll be bound, on that smuggled brandy; and I'm no sure he would scruple to take your life if he found ye in a convenient place. It's a terrible thing to think of, a human being brought up like that, in a country of law and order and releeigion. But I've no pity for him, not one jot! He and his have done me sufficient harm; but I'll be even with him yet – the cheat-the-gallows!"

Mary Stanley, though not much of a coward, seemed to shrink back a little in unconscious dismay. She had never seen such venomous rage working in any human creature's face; and it was rather an appalling kind of thing. But presently Mr. Purdie seemed to recollect himself; this exhibition of overmastering hate was not the best means of propitiating his new mistress; and so, making a determined effort to control himself (and helping himself to another glass of sherry at the same time) he proceeded to talk of business, with a certain constrained, matter-of-fact air.

"You said before we came in to dinner, Miss Stanley," he began, in his slow and deliberate way, "that you wished fifteen years' of the dyke tax to be remitted and returned to the Cruagan crofters. Very well. Whatever is your pleasure. But have you considered what the result will be?"

"No," said Mary, "I do not wish to consider. I wish to have the thing done, because I think it is right."

"For one matter," said he, "they will take it, and not thank you."

"I do not care about that," she made answer. "We will see about the thanks, or no thanks, later on."

"But there's more," said the factor, rousing himself from his forced restraint of manner. "They'll just begin to think that the time for the universal getting of everything for nothing has come at last; and where will there be an end to their outrageous demands? The ignorant creatures! – they do not know what they want – they're like children crying for the moon; and they're encouraged by a set of agitators more ignorant than themselves – people in Parliament, and out of it, that never saw a peat-moss, and don't know the difference between a hog and a stirk – "

"But wait a moment, Mr. Purdie," said she, with some touch of calm authority. "I can hardly tell you yet what I intend to do; I have all kinds of enquiries to make. But every one is well enough aware that, whatever the cause or causes may be, there is great distress among the crofters – great poverty – and, naturally, discontent; and when I hear of them almost starving for want of land – and such immense tracts given over to deer – I know that a great wrong is being done. And that is not going to exist wherever I have a word to say."

"It cannot exist on this estate, Miss Stanley," the factor said, with confidence. "For we have not a single acre of forested land."

"What did I hear my brother say, then, about eleven stags in one season?" she demanded. "Why, he asked me to ask him up here this next autumn for the very purpose of going stalking!"

"Yes, yes, very likely," said the Little Red Dwarf, with the magnanimity born of superior knowledge. "The fact is that when the deer begin to get restless about the end of September and the beginning of October, a few stags and hinds come wandering on to our ground, between the Meall-na-Fearn and the Corrie-Bhreag mostly. But that is not forest; that is all under sheep; that belongs to Mr. Watson's sheep-farm: the stags the gentlemen get in the autumn are mere chance shots; we have not a bit of forested land. Indeed, Miss Stanley, ye'll rarely hear the crofters, in any part of the country, clamouring to have a deer forest split up amongst them; they know well enough what wretched and hopeless kind of stuff it is; they're wiser than the hawing folk in Parliament. No, no; it's slices off the big arable and pasture farms they want. And I can tell ye this," he went on, in quite a reasonable way (for young Ross of Heimra was off his mind now), "there's many a proprietor in the Highlands would be willing and even glad to break up his big sheep-farms into small holdings; but where is either landlord or tenant to find the money to pay for the housing, and steading, and fencing; and where is the new tenant to find stock? To change the crofters into small farmers would be a fine thing, no doubt – an excellent thing, a great reform; and it would pay the landlords well if it were practicable. But how is it practicable? Before the scheme would work, the crofter would have to be given land worth at least £20 a year; and where is the capital to come from for stock and steading?"

Mary listened, a little uneasily, but not much daunted; for this was merely the professional view; this was an advocacy of the existing state of things; and it was the existing state of things, in this small possession of hers, that she hoped to amend, if it was within her power. Nor could she argue with him, seeing she had no facts at her fingers' ends as yet, or, at least, none that she could rely on; for it was personal inquiry and observation that this young woman meant to trust.

"If they can make the small crofts pay – " said she, vaguely.

"But they cannot," said he, with south country bluntness. "The land is too poor; and there are too many of them wanting to live on it. Over there at Cruagan the crofters manage to earn a little money by serving as gillies in the autumn, and hiring their ponies to the sportsmen; and along the coast here they eke out a living with the fishing; but they would fairly starve on the crofts, if that was all. And then, besides the poor soil, I do believe they're the idlest and laziest creatures on God's earth! I'll undertake to say there has not been a boat put off from shore this last week past, though there must be plenty of stenlock in the bay – "

But here Käthchen struck in, a little indignantly. She had Highland blood in her veins; and she did not like to hear her countrymen and countrywomen traduced by an *Albannach*.

"Stenlock? You mean big lythe?" said she. "But you know very well, Mr. Purdie, there is no market for lythe. They're no use to send away. And even if they were – even if there were a market for them – how could the people get them sent? How often does the steamer call in here?"

"Oh, well, not very often at this time of the year," he said.

"But how often?" she persisted.

"Once in three weeks," said the factor.

And now it was Mary's turn to interpose, which she did eagerly and gladly, for she was ever on the alert for some actual and definite thing to tackle.

"Oh, really, Mr. Purdie, that is too bad! How can you expect them to be diligent with the fishing, if the steamer only calls in once in three weeks? That must be put right, and at once!" said she, in her generous ardour. "I will appeal to the Government. I will appeal to the Treasury."

"You'd better appeal to Mr. MacBrayne," said Käthchen, drily; and therewithal that subject was laid aside for the moment.

Unfortunately this reasonable mood on the part of the Little Red Dwarf – if he could properly be called little whose great breadth of frame caused him to look like a compressed giant – did not last very long. His half-smothered hatred of the house of Heimra broke into flame again; and it is possible that a glass of whiskey which he took at the end of dinner, combined with the previous sherry, may have added fuel to the fire.

"I've warned ye, Miss Stanley, not to say a word about the Ross family, or what I've told ye, or about any of your plans, before that lass Barbara."

"Why all this mystery and suspicion!" said Mary, with a touch of impatience. "The girl seems a very obliging and good-natured girl indeed."

"She's a sister o' the head keeper," said the factor, with a watchful glance towards the door; "and that scoundrel of a young Ross is just hand-in-glove with every man-jack o' them. Do ye think they've got any eyes in their head if my young gentleman is after a salmon on the Garra, or lying in wait for a stag in the Corrie Bhreag? They would swear themselves black in the face that they did not see him if he was standing staring at them within twenty yards!"

"Very well, then; if you cannot trust the keepers, why not get others in their place?" she said, promptly. "Not that I care much about the game. I propose to give the crofters, big and little, free right to trap, or snare, or shoot all the hares and rabbits they can get hold of; I do not wish their little bits of holdings to be plundered by useless beasts. But grouse do no harm; and whether my own people come here next autumn, or whether I let the shooting, all the same there will be the employment of gillies' labour, and the hiring of the ponies."

"Yes!" said the factor. "The only money that ever finds its way into their pocket; and yet you'll find the idjuts declaring amongst themselves that not a single stranger should be allowed to come into the country!"

"That is foolishness," said Mary, calmly. "That is the idle talk of people who are poor and suffering, and do not know why they are poor and suffering. And I, for one, mean to take no heed of it; though, to be sure, it would be pleasanter to think I was a little more welcome. However, about those keepers: if they do not attend to their duty, if they allow poaching, why not get others in their place?"

"That would be worse," said Mr. Purdie, emphatically. "The strange keepers would be helpless; they would be outwitted at every turn. If ye knew the folk about here better, their clannishness, their cunning –"

"But are you sure this poaching goes on, Mr. Purdie," she interposed, "or is it only guesswork on your part? I presume Mr. Ross calls himself a gentleman."

"A gentleman!" said the factor, with that malevolent look coming into his eyes again. "A gentleman that earns his living by selling smuggled brandy to a wheen crofters! A fine gentleman, that! I suppose when the Duke's yacht sails into the bay out there, my gentleman makes haste to hide away the bottles, and takes care to say nothing about the five shillings a gallon profit! Ay, ay, a remarkable change for the great family! – no playacting about with the Prince Regent now, but selling contraband speerits to a lot of old women! And snuff, maybe? And tobacco? Penny packets! – a noble trade!" He laughed aloud, to conceal the vehemence of his hatred. "A fine come-down for high birth and ancient gentility – buried alive in an island, not daring to show his head even in Edinburgh, let alone in London, his only companions a wheen thieving gillies and scringe-net fishermen! But plenty of pride all the same. Oh, yes; pride and concealment, they go together in the Highland character: would ye believe it, when he denied his mother Christian burial, and made the grave up there on the hill, would he put up a respectable monument in the ordinary way, so that people could see it? No, no; it's on the sea-ward side of the island. Pride again, ye observe; a scorn of the common people; pride and concealment together."

"I should think it was a great deal more likely," said Käthchen, with some touch of anger, "that the mother chose where her own grave was to be." But Mary, with thoughtful eyes, only said: "Poor woman!"

"Ay, ay, pride enough," continued Mr. Purdie, in a more triumphant strain. "But their pride had a famous fall before your uncle and myself were done with them – "

At this Mary started somewhat.

"My uncle?" said she. "Why, what cause of offence could there have been between him and them? What injury could they possibly have done him?"

"Injury? Plenty of injury: in stirring up ill-will and rebellion among the tenants. It's yourself, Miss Stanley, will find that out ere long; oh, yes, wait till ye come to have dealings with these people, ye'll find out what they are, I'm thinking! A stubborn and stiff-necked race; and cunning as the very mischief; and revengeful and dark. But we broke their obstinacy that time!" He laughed again: a malignant laugh.

"I saw ye noticed it, Miss Stanley, as we came along this afternoon – the dried-up place that was once a loch, and the pile of stones – "

She remembered well enough; and also she recollected the vicious slash the driver had made at his horses when the factor was grinningly answering her question.

"Yes, but I did not quite understand what it meant," said she.

"I'll just tell ye."

Mr. Purdie poured himself out a little drop of whiskey – a very little drop – in an inadvertent way. There was quite a happy look on his face when he began his tale.

"Ay; it's a fine story when people of obstinate nature meet their match; and your uncle, Miss Stanley, could hold his own – when there was proper counsel behind his back, if I may say so. And what had Mrs. Ross and her son to do with anything on the land? Heimra island out there had been reserved for them all the way through, as the estate was going bit by bit; and when Lochgarra went as well, there was still the island to preserve the name of the family, as it were. And was not that enough? What did they want – what could any one want – with Loch Heimra and Castle Heimra, when they had been sold into other hands? If they wanted the name kept in perpetuity, there was the island – which undoubtedly belonged to the Rosses; but the loch and the castle on the mainland, they were gone; they had been sold, given up, cut adrift. And so, says your uncle, 'we'll cut adrift the name too. They have their Heimra Island; that is sufficient: the loch and the castle are mine, and that must be understood by all and sundry.' Natural, quite natural. Would ye have people giving themselves a title from things not belonging to them at all, but to you? And what was the castle but a heap of old stones, with about six or seven hundred years of infamy, and bloodshed, and cruelty attached to it? Ay; they could show ye a red patch on the earthen floor of the dungeon that was never dry summer or winter. Many's the queer thing took place in that stronghold in the old days. 'Well, well,' says your uncle, 'if they will call themselves "of Heimra," let it be of Heimra Island. The loch and the castle are not theirs, but mine; and, being mine, I am going to give my own name to them. Loch Stanley – Castle Stanley – that's what they are to be. I'm not going to have strangers calling themselves after my property. Let them keep the island if they like – "

"Why, what did it matter?" said Mary. "They did not claim either the castle or the loch. It was merely the old association – the historical association; and what harm did that do to any one? And an interesting place like that, that has been in possession of the same family for centuries – "

"But, surely, a man has the right to do what he likes with his own?" said the Troich Bheag Dhearg, with the corners of his mouth drawn down, and his small eyes looking forth a challenge. "I can tell ye, Miss Stanley, your uncle was a man not to thwarted – "

"I dare say!" said Mary, coldly.

"Castle Stanley – Loch Stanley – that was now established; let them take their title from what belonged to them, which was the island. Ay; but do ye think the people about here would follow the change?" Mr. Purdie went on, with something more of vindictiveness coming into his tone. "Would they? Not one o' them, the stubborn deevils! There was not an old bedridden woman, there was not a laddie on his way to school, ye could get to say 'Castle Stanley' or 'Loch Stanley'; it was Loch Heimra

and Castle Heimra from every one; and they held on to it as if it had been the Westminster Confession of Faith – the dour and bigoted animals they are! Even the very gamekeepers, that ye might think would be afraid o' losing their situation, they were just like the rest, though they had their plausible and cunning excuses. 'You see, Mr. Stanley,' they would say, 'if we tell the gillies about Castle Stanley they will think it is Lochgarra House we mean; and if we send them to Loch Stanley, they will be going down to the seashore.' But well I know who was at the back of all their stubbornness," the factor continued, with a scowling face. "Well I know: it was that idling, mischievous, thrawn-natured, impudent ne'er-do-weel, egging them on, and egging them on, and keeping himself in the background all the time. The dignity of his family! I suppose that was what he was after – the old castle and the old name; so that strangers might think that his mother and he had still property on the mainland! And I warned your uncle about it. I warned him. I told him that as long as that graceless scoundrel was in the neighbourhood there would be nothing but spite and opposition on the part of the tenantry. 'Well, then,' said he, 'for spite there will be spite, if it comes to that!' Miss Stanley, your uncle was not a man to be defied."

"I know," said Mary, with downcast face: she foresaw what was coming – and did not at all share in the savage glee the factor was beginning to betray.

"'Give them time, Mr. Purdie,' says he. 'If I buy a dog, or a horse, or a house, I can call it by what name I please; and so I can with a piece of water and an old ruin. But not too much time, Mr. Purdie – not too much time. If they have a will of their own, so have I. If there's to be neither Loch Stanley nor Castle Stanley, I'll make pretty well sure there will be neither Loch Heimra nor Castle Heimra. I'll put an end to those Rosses calling themselves after any part of my property. I'll soon wipe out the last trace of them from the mainland, anyway; and they're welcome to the island out there, for anything I mind. The seven centuries of history can follow them across the water; I've no room for such things on my estate.' And that's just how it came about, Miss Stanley. Not one creature in the whole of the district but would stick to the old name; crofter, cottar, shepherd, fisher-laddie, they were all alike. There was no help for it; Your uncle was a determined man. Anyone that contended with him was bound to get the worst of it; and here he was dealing with his own. 'Very well,' said he, 'if there's to be no Castle Stanley, I'll take care there shall be no Castle Heimra. Mr. Purdie, get the loch drained of its last drop of water, and have every stone of the useless old ruin hauled to the ground!' And that's precisely what ye saw this afternoon, Miss Stanley!"

Her reply somewhat astonished the vain-glorious factor, who had perhaps been expecting approval.

"It was shamelessly done!" said she – but as if she were not addressing him at all.

And then she rose, and Kate Glendinning rose also; so that Mr. Purdie practically found himself dismissed – or rather he dismissed himself, pleading that it was late. He made some appointment for the next morning, and presently left: no doubt glad enough to get a chance of lighting his pipe and having a comfortable smoke on his way home to the inn.

When the two girls went into the drawing-room – which was a large hexagonal room in the tower, with windows looking north, west, and south – they found that the lamps had not yet been brought in, and also perceived, to their surprise, that the night outside had cleared and was now brilliant with its thousands of throbbing stars. They went to one of the windows. The heavily-moaning sea was hardly visible, but the heavens were extraordinarily lustrous; they were even aware of a shimmer of light on the grey stone terrace without: perhaps it was from the gleaming belt of Orion that hung above a dark headland jutting out towards the west; while there, also, was the still more fiery Sirius, that burned and palpitated behind the black birch-woods in the south. And then they turned to seek the island of Heimra – out there on the mystic and sombre plain – under that far-trembling and shining canopy.

"Well," said Käthchen, with some vehemence of indignation (for her Highland blood had mounted to her head) "I know this, Mary: scapegrace or no scapegrace, if I were the young fellow

living out there, I know what I should do – I would kill that factor! Isn't it perfectly clear it was he who goaded your uncle into pulling down the old castle and draining the loch?"

Mary was silent for a second or two. Then she said, in an absent kind of way —

"There are wrongs and injuries done that can never be undone. I can never rebuild Castle Heimra."

CHAPTER III.

THE CAVE OF THE CROWING COCK

Mary Stanley's eyes had not deceived her; the boat of which she had caught a momentary glimpse was a smart little yawl of twenty tons or so, that was making in for Heimra Island; and there were three men on deck – two redcaps forward, the master at the helm. This last was a young fellow of about six and twenty, a little, not much, over middle height, of somewhat pale complexion, and with singularly dark eyes and hair. The curious thing was this: though you could not say that any of his features were particularly fine (except, perhaps, his coal-black eyes, which were clearly capable of flame, if the occasion demanded) the general effect of them was striking; they seemed to convey an impression of strength – of a certain lazy audacity of strength; while the forehead revealed by the peaked cap being pushed carelessly backward denoted at once intelligence and resolution. But indeed at this moment the young man's attitude was one of merely quiescent indifference – though there was an occasional quick scrutiny of the neighbouring coast; all the graver perils of the voyage were over; they were running easily before a steady wind; and they would get safely to their anchorage ere the light had wholly died out of the western skies.

"Down foresail!" he called to the men. For now they were passing a headland that formed one of two arms encircling a sheltered little bay – a strangely silent and solitary-looking place it seemed in this mysterious light. Sterile, too; tumbled masses of rock with hardly a scrap of vegetation on them; a few clumps of birches here and there; an occasional dark green pine higher up the cliffs. But at all events it was quiet and still; the water lapped clear and crisp along the shingle; while the murmur of the outer sea was still everywhere around, and also, on the northern side of the bay, there was a long out-jutting reef where there was a continuous surge of white foam over the saw-toothed edge.

"Down jib!" The sound of a human voice was so strange in this solitude – far stranger than the mere rattle of blocks and tackle.

"Main sheet!"

The two men came aft: the steersman jammed down his helm; the vessel slowly rounded into the wind – the boom being hauled in meanwhile – the mainsail flapping and shivering in the light breeze.

"Stand by to let go!" was the next order; and the hands went forward again – the vessel gradually losing the way that was on her, until she seemed absolutely motionless.

"Let go!"

There was a splash and a roar that sent a thousand shuddering echoes through the silence. A heron uttered a hoarse croak and rose on heavy and slow-moving wings to make for some distant shelter. A pair of dunlins – unseen in the dusk – added their shrill piping cry. Then all was still again, save for the continual moaning of the surge on the distant reef.

"Give a haul at the topping-lift, lads!" This was the final direction; and then, with another keen look round the little bay, young Ross of Heimra – or Donuil Og Vich Iain Vich Ruari, as some were proud to call him – went down into the cabin to put a few things together before going ashore.

Of the two sailors now left on the deck one was a powerfully built man of about thirty, with a close-clipped brown beard, bushy brown eyebrows, and eyes of a clear Celtic grey. His name was Kenneth Macleod; but he was more generally known as *Coinneach Breac* – that is to say, Kenneth of the small-pox marks. His companion was younger than himself – a lad of twenty or two-and-twenty; long and loutish of figure; but with a pleasant expression of face. This was Malcolm, or rather, Calum, as they called him. Probably he had some other name; but it was never heard of; the long, lumpish, heavily-shouldered lad was simply known throughout this neighbourhood as Calum, or Calum-a-bhata, Calum of the Boat.

"It is I who will have a sound sleep this night," said he, in Gaelic, as he stretched his hands above his head and yawned.

"And I, too, when the work is over," said his neighbour, pulling out a short black pipe. "And now you see what it is to have many friends. Oh, I know you, Calum; you are a young lad: and you are strong: you think of nothing but fighting, like the other young lads. But let me tell you this, Calum; it is not a good thing, fighting and quarrelling, and making enemies; it is easier to make enemies than to make friends: and many times you will be sorry when it is too late, and when that has been put wrong which you cannot put right. For you know what the wise man of Islay said. Calum; he said – '*He who killed his mother a few moments ago would fain have her alive now!*'"

"But who was talking about fighting, Coinneach – tell me that?" said the youth, angrily.

"I was giving you advice, Calum, my son," said Coinneach – lighting his pipe and pulling away, though there appeared to be very little tobacco inside. "I was telling you that it was a good thing to have many friends, as the master has. Oh, he is the one to make friends, and no doubt about that! For look you at this, Calum; you know what is stowed in the cabin; and here we come into the bay, without waiting for the night at all, and just as if there was nothing on board but a few tins of meat for our own use and a loaf or two. That is the wisdom of having many friends, as I am telling you. Why, if there was any one after us, if there was any one wishing to put trouble upon us, do you know what would have happened this evening? – there would have been a bonfire on every headland between Ru Gobhar and the Black Bay. And that is what I tell you, Calum, that it is a very good thing to have plenty of friends ashore, who are as your own kinspeople to you, and will come between you and the stranger, and will see that the stranger does not harm you. The master, he is the one to make friends with old and young; and believe me as far as that goes, Calum. Ay, you are a young lad; and you do not know what the world is; and you do not know what it is to go sailing with a hard skipper; and if you are an apprentice, a bucket of water in your bunk to wake you in the morning. But the master – oh, well, now, look at this: if there is bad weather, and there is something difficult to be done, and you do it smartly, why, then he calls out to you '*Fhir mo chridhe!*'¹ and that is a far more welcome thing to you than cursing and swearing; it is a far more welcome thing, and a good thing to comfort you." He shook the ashes out of his pipe, and put it in his pocket. "Well, now, see to the tackle, Calum, and we'll get the boat hoisted out, for the master will be going ashore."

The boat – a twelve-footer or thereabouts – had been stowed on deck; but they soon had her launched over the side, and everything put ship-shape and in readiness. And presently the young man who had gone down into the cabin re-appeared again; he threw some things into the boat, and took his place in the stern-sheets; the men shoved off, and presently they were well on their way to the beach, where there was a rudely-formed slip. By this time the streaks of lemon-hued light that had appeared in the west were dying away; darkness was coming over land and sea; already, in the east, one or two stars were visible between the thinning and breaking clouds. Young Ross landed at the slip, and made his way up to a level plateau on which stood a long, rambling, one-storeyed building mostly of timber: a sort of bungalow, with a slated porch, and with some little pretence of a garden round it, though at this time of the year nothing, of course, was visible in it but a few leafless bushes. At the door stood an old woman neatly and smartly dressed, whose eyes were still expressive enough to show how pleased she was.

"Good evening to you, Martha," said he in Gaelic, "and I hope you are well."

"Indeed I am all the better for seeing you back, sir," replied the old woman, with many smiles. "The house is no house at all when you are away."

She followed him obsequiously into the narrow hall. He only glanced at the newspapers and letters on the table. But there was something else there – a brace of grouse.

¹ *Fhir mo chridhe!* – Man of my heart!

"Will I cook one of the birds for Mr. Ross's dinner?" she asked, her Highland politeness causing her to address him in the third person.

A quick frown came over his face.

"Who brought these here?" he demanded.

"Oh, well – they were left," said old Martha, evasively.

"Yes, yes, left; but who left them?" he asked again.

"Oh, well; maybe it was the Lochgarra keepers," said she.

"The keepers? Nonsense!" he said angrily. "Do you tell me the keepers would shoot grouse at this time of the year, when the birds have paired, and soon will be nesting? It was Gillie Ciotach,² I'll be bound. Now you will tell the Gillie Ciotach, Martha, that if he does not stop his tricks I will have him sent across the land to go before the Sheriff at Dingwall; and how will he like that?"

"Oh, well, indeed, sir," said Martha, in a deprecating way, "the poor young lad meant no harm. He was coming over here anyway, because he lost a dog, and he was wishing to find the dog."

At this the young master burst out laughing.

"The Gillie Ciotach is an excellent one for lies, and that is certain!" said he. "His dog? And how could his dog swim across from Lochgarra to Eilean Heimra? Tell Gillie Ciotach from me that when he comes over here he may look after the lobsters, but he will be better not to tell lies about a dog, and also he will do well to leave the Lochgarra grouse alone. And now, Martha, if there is any dinner for me, let me have it at once; for I am going back to the yacht by-and-bye."

He went into the simply-furnished dining-room, where there was a lamp on the table and likewise a magnificent peat-fire ablaze in the big iron grate – a welcome change from the little stove in the cabin of the *Sirène*. He had brought his letters with him in his hand. He drew in a wickerwork lounging-chair towards the fireplace, and idly began to tear the envelopes open: here were tidings, various hushed voices, as it were, from the busy world that seemed so distant to him, living in these remote solitudes. It is true he had been away for a time from Eilean Heimra; but during that interval there had not been much of human companionship for him; nay, there was for the most part a greater loneliness than ever, especially when he took his watch on deck at night, sending the two men below for much-needed rest. Indeed these letters and newspapers seemed almost to make a stir and noise! – so used had he been to silence and the abstraction of his own thoughts.

² *Gillie Ciotach* – the left-handed young man.

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