BLACK WILLIAM

DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA (VOLUME 3 OF 3)

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
SMOKE AND FLAME

But that was not at all the view that Fred Stanley took of this amazing and incomprehensible incident.

"There's some trick in it, Frank," he said vehemently, as he hurried his friend along with him, on their way back to the house. "There's some underhand trick in it, and I want to know what it means. I tell you, we must get the keepers, and go up the hill at once, and see what is going on. There's something at the bottom of all this jugglery."

"Jugglery or no jugglery," his companion said, with much good-humour, "it has come in very handy. If a riot had been started, who knows what the end might have been? It wasn't the raid into the Glen Orme forest that concerned me, nor yet the driving of the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn; but I confess I was anxious about your sister. If she had been denounced before an angry and excited meeting – "

"Oh, we should have been able to take care of ourselves!" the younger man said, dismissing that matter contemptuously.

"And if it was Ross of Heimra who stepped in to prevent all this," Meredyth continued, "I, for one, am very much obliged to him."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Frank!" the other said, with angry impatience. "If it is Donald Ross who has done all this, I'll swear he has done it for his own purposes. And I want to know. I want to find out. I want to see what the trick means. And of one thing I am absolutely certain, and that is, that Donald Ross is up on the moor at this very moment. Oh, yes," the young man went on, seeing that his wild suspicions received no encouragement from his more cautious companion, "a fine stratagem, to keep us idling and kicking our heels about here all the morning – and on the Twelfth, too! I thought it was odd that the meeting should be fixed for the Twelfth; but now I begin to see. Now I begin to understand why Donald Ross came over from Heimra yesterday afternoon."

"Well, what do you imagine?" Meredyth asked.

"Why, it's as clear as daylight!" the younger man exclaimed – jumping from vague surmises to definite conclusions. "Here have we been hanging about all the morning, like a couple of simpletons, waiting for a general riot or some nonsense of that kind, while Ross and his gang of poachers have been up on the moor, sweeping the best beats clean of every bird! That has been the little programme! – and a fine consignment of game to be

sent away to Inverness to-night, as soon as the dark comes down. But they may not be off the hill yet; and we'll hurry up Hector and Hugh, and have a look round." And then he added, vindictively: "I'd let the Twelfth go – I shouldn't mind a bit having had the Twelfth spoilt – if only I could catch those scoundrels – and the chief of them – red-handed."

"All I have to say is," observed the more phlegmatic Meredyth, "that if we are going up the hill we may as well take our guns with us and a brace of dogs. We can have an hour or two. The fag-end of the Twelfth is better than no Twelfth; and your sister says she wants some birds."

"Birds?" the other repeated. "What do you expect to find on the ground after those poaching thieves have been over it?"

However, in the end he consented; and as they found that Hector – undisturbed by all those alarming rumours of riot and pillage – had kept everything in readiness for them, the two young men snatched a hasty sandwich and set forth. It was not a very eager shooting party. There was a sensation that the great possibilities of the Twelfth had been ruined for them. Nevertheless, there would be some occupation for the afternoon, and the mistress of the household wanted some grouse.

But, indeed, it soon became evident that it was not shooting that was uppermost in Fred Stanley's mind. He overruled Hector's plan for taking the nearest beats. He would have his companions hold away up the Corrie Bhreag, which leads to the Glen Orme forest; and ever he was making for the higher ranges

– scanning the ground far ahead of him, and listening intently in the strange silence; while he was clearly unwilling to have the dogs uncoupled.

"Look here, man," at length said Meredyth, who, though new to the place, had a trained eye for the features of a moor; "surely we have come down wind far enough? It will take us all our time to get back before dinner, even if we pick the beats on the way home – "

The answer was unexpected – a half-smothered exclamation of mingled anger and triumph.

"Didn't I tell you so?" young Stanley exclaimed, with his eyes fixed on a small, dark object a long distance up the glen. "Didn't I tell you we should find him here? Don't you see him – away up yonder? My lad, when you come poaching, you shouldn't put on sailor's clothes; they're too conspicuous. What do you say, Hector: can you make him out? Well, whether you can or not, I will tell you his name. That is Mr. Donald Ross, if you want to know – and I guessed we should find him here or hereabouts!"

"I am not sure," said Hector, slowly, also with his eyes fixed on the distant and dark figure.

"But I am!" Fred Stanley went on. "And perhaps you can tell me what he is doing up on our shooting?"

"Mebbe," said the serious-visaged keeper, with a little hesitation, "mebbe he was waiting to see that none of the lads would be for going into the forest. Or mebbe he was up at Glen Orme."

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!" the young man cried, scornfully. "Do you think we are children! I tell you, we have caught him at last; and wherever the rest of the gang have sneaked off to, he is bound to come along here and face it out. Yes, he is coming: I can see he is moving this way. Very well, Frank, you have the dogs uncoupled now, and begin to shoot back home: I'm going to meet my gentleman – and I will take my gun with me, just to keep a wholesome check on insolence."

"You will not," said Meredyth, with decision – for he knew not whither this young man's obvious wrath and enmity might not lead him. "I will wait here with you: whoever that is, he is clearly coming this way."

"Why, of course he must!" was the rejoinder. "He sees he is caught: what else is there left for him but to come along and try to put some kind of face on it?" Then presently he exclaimed: "Well, of all the effrontry that I ever beheld! He is carrying a gun under his arm! – how's that for coolness?"

"I am not thinking it is a gun, sir," said the tall, brown-bearded keeper; "it is more like a steeck."

"Yes, it is a stick, Fred," Meredyth put in, after a moment.

"Oh, why should he have a gun? What does he want with a gun?" the young man said, without being disconcerted for a moment. "He has only to direct the operations of his confederates. A stick? – very likely! – the master-poacher doesn't want to be encumbered with a gun!"

And so they waited. It was a singular scene for the Twelfth

of August on the side of a Highland hill: no ranging of dogs, no cracking of breechloaders, no picking up of a bird here and there from the thick heather, but a small group, standing silent and constrained, and dimly aware that pent-up human passions were about to burst forth amid these vast and impressive solitudes. Young Ross of Heimra – for it was unmistakably he – came leisurely along; his attention was evidently fixed on the sportsmen; perhaps he was wondering that they did not let loose the dogs and get to work. But as he drew nearer he must have perceived that they were awaiting his approach; and so – with something of interrogation and surprise in his look – he came up to them.

"I hope you have had good sport," said Fred Stanley.

Donald Ross stared: there was something in the young man's tone that seemed to strike him.

"I – I don't quite understand," said he.

"Oh, well, it's only this," replied the other, striving to keep down his rising rage, and speaking in a deliberately taunting fashion, "that when you find anyone on a Highland moor on the Twelfth of August you naturally suppose that he has come for grouse. And why not? I am sorry we have interrupted you. When you have the fishing and the stalking, why shouldn't you have the shooting as well? I am sorry if we have disturbed you – "

They formed a curious contrast, those two: the tall, handsome, light-haired youth, with his fair complexion and his boyish moustache causing him to look almost effeminate, and yet with

his nostrils dilated, his haughty grey eyes glistening with anger, a tremor of passion about the lines of his lips; the other, though hardly so tall, of more manly presence, his pale, proud, clear-cut features entirely reticent, his coal-black eyes, so far, without flame in them, an absolute self-possession and dignity governing his manner.

"I hardly know what you mean," said he, slowly, fixing those calmly observant black eyes on the young lad. "What is it all about? Do I understand you to accuse me of shooting over your moor – here – now? – do you imagine – "

"Oh, it isn't that only! – it is half-a-dozen things besides!" the young man exclaimed, letting his passion get entirely the mastery of him. "Who has this place? Not those who bought it! It is you who have the shooting and fishing and everything; and not content with that but you play dog-in-the-manger as well – heaving stones into the pools when anyone else goes down to the river. And who does the scringeing about here? – answer me that! – do you think we don't know well enough? Let us have an end of hypocrisy – "

"Let us have an end of madness!" said Donald Ross, sternly; and for a second there was a gleam of fire in his black eyes. But that sudden flame, and a certain set expression of the mouth, almost instantly vanished; this young fellow, with the girlish complexion, was even now so curiously like his sister. "I do not answer you," Donald Ross went on, with a demeanour at once simple and austere. "You have chosen to insult me. I do not

answer you. You are in my country: it is the same as if you were under my roof."

"Your country!" the hot-headed young man cried, in open scorn, "What part of the country belongs to you! That rock of an island out there! – and I wish you would keep to it; and you'd better keep to it; for we don't mean to have this kind of thing going on any longer. We mean to have an end of all this scringeing and poaching! We have been precious near getting hold of those scringe-nets: we'll make sure of them the next time. And I want once for all to tell you that we mean to have the fishing for ourselves, and the shooting, too; and we want you to understand that there is such a thing as the law of trespass. What right have you to be here, at this moment, on this moor?" he demanded. "How can you explain your being here? What are you doing here – on the Twelfth? Do you know to whom this moor belongs? And by what right do you trespass on it?"

"Fred," interposed Frank Meredyth, who was painfully conscious that the two keepers – though they had discreetly turned away – must be hearing something of this one-sided altercation, "enough of this: if there is any dispute, it can be settled another time – not before third persons."

"One moment," said Donald Ross, turning with a grave courtesy to this intervener. "You have heard the questions I have just been asked. Well, I do not choose to account for my actions to any one. But this I wish to explain. I have no right to be where I am, I admit; I have trespassed some dozen yards on to this moor,

in order to come up and speak to you. When you saw me first I was on the old footpath – there it is, you can see for yourself – that leads up this corrie, and through the Glen Orme forest to Ledmore; it is an old hill road that everyone has the right of using."

"Oh, yes, thieves' lawyers are always clever enough!" Fred Stanley said, disdainfully.

Donald Ross regarded him for a moment – with a strange kind of look, and that not of anger: then he quietly said, "Good afternoon!" to Meredyth, and went on his way. Hector got out of the prevailing embarrassment by uncoupling the dogs; and Frank Meredyth put cartridges in his gun. This encounter did not augur well for steady shooting.

Meanwhile Donald Ross was making down for the coast, slowly and thoughtfully. What had happened had been a matter of a few swift seconds; it had now to be set in order and considered; the scene had to be conjured up again – with all its minute but vivid incidents. And no longer was there any need for him to affect a calm and proud indifference; phrases that he had seemed to pass unheeded began to burn; the rapid glances and tones of those brief moments, now that they were recalled, struck deep. Indeed, the first effect of a blow is but to stun and bewilder – the pain comes afterwards; and there are words that cause more deadly wounds than any blows. Taunt and insult: these are hard things for a Highlander to brook – and yet – and yet – that handsome, headstrong boy, even in the white-heat of

his passion, had looked so curiously like his sister.

"Ah, well," said Ross, aloud, and there was a kind of smile on his face, "it is, perhaps, a wholesome lesson. Hereafter I'd better mind my own business. And if I have been ordered off the mainland – sent back to my little island – very well: the sea-gulls and gannets won't accuse me of trespass."

In time he drew near the village. But as he went down the hill from Minard, and had to pass Lochgarra House, he did not turn his eyes in that direction. He held straight on; and at length encountered a small boy who had just been engaged in hauling a dinghy up on the beach.

"Alan," said he, "have you seen Big Archie anywhere about?"

"Ay," said the boy, "he was at the inn to look at the people driving aweh."

"What people? The strangers who were at the church this morning?"

"Ay, chist that. There was many a one laughing at them," said Alan, with a bit of a grin.

"Well, run along now, and see if you can find Big Archie, and tell him I am going out to Heimra. Then you can come back with him, and pull us out to the lugger."

And away went Alan, with a will, eager to earn the sixpence that he foresaw awaiting his return, while the young laird of Heimra, having nothing else to do until Big Archie should put in an appearance, seated himself on the gunwale of the dinghy, with his eyes turned towards the sea. Not once had he glanced in

the direction of Lochgarra House.

But Lochgarra House had taken notice of him. Mary Stanley chanced to be passing one of the windows, when of a sudden her face grew animated, and her eyes – those liquid grey-green eyes that were at all times so clear and radiant – those bland, good-humoured, kind eyes – shone with a quick interest and delight.

"Käthchen! Käthchen!" she called. "There is Mr. Ross just gone by – tell Barbara to run after him – quick! quick! – and – and my compliments – and I want to see him most particularly. He must not go out to Heimra before I have seen him – tell her not to lose a minute – I'm afraid he may be going along now to get Big Archie's boat."

But at such a crisis Kate Glendinning did not choose to wait for any servant. She flew into the hall, snatched a straw hat from the table, tripped down the wide stone steps, and made her way as quickly as might be round the sea-wall and along the beach. He did not hear her approach; he seem plunged in a profound reverie.

"Mr. Ross!" she said, rather breathlessly and timidly, to attract his attention.

He started to his feet; and, when he saw who this was, his naturally pale, dark face grew suddenly suffused – an almost school-boyish constraint visible there for a moment! Käthchen was surprised; but she made haste to deliver Miss Stanley's message.

"She happened to see you from the window; and she is most

anxious you should not go back to Heimra before she has a chance of thanking you for your great kindness. For she quite understands it was you who prevented all the mischief that might have arisen from those people coming here; and she is very grateful; and wishes to say so to yourself. And I was to give you her compliments, and say that she wished particularly to see you – if you wouldn't mind coming along for a few moments."

This time he did throw a brief glance in the direction of Lochgarra House – perhaps thinking of what otherwise might have been. But now, how could he ever again be under that roof?

"Will you tell Miss Stanley," said he – and though that temporary confusion had gone, there was still a curious reserve in his manner – "that I am very glad if I have been of any service to her – very glad that she should think so, I mean; but it isn't worth speaking about; and she must not say anything more about it."

"But she wishes to see you!" exclaimed Käthchen, who naturally had expected an instant acquiescence. "Surely she is the best judge as to whether she ought to thank you, or not. And that was the message I was to take to you, that she wished most particularly to see you, before you went out to Heimra. A few moments only – she will not detain you – "

"If you will excuse me, I would rather not go along," said he, looking uneasily towards the cottages and the inn. "I have just sent for Big Archie."

Käthchen was astounded. What kind of a young man was this, to refuse the invitation of a beautiful young woman – one, indeed,

who had shown herself singularly interested in him, even as he had gone out of his way to render friendly little services to her? Käthchen's secret conjectures, founded on what she had recently observed as between these two, seemed to have been suddenly and rudely stultified. What was the key to this enigma? Jealousy? Was it the presence of Frank Meredyth that interposed? Would he decline to visit the house until that possible rival had been removed? She could not understand; she was bewildered; but still she had her commission to execute; and the faithful Kate was staunch.

"Miss Stanley will be disappointed," said she. "She is most anxious to see you. A couple of minutes would be enough. And surely you could let Big Archie wait."

"Thank you," said he – and it was clear that it was with the greatest reluctance he was forcing himself to refuse – "but I would rather not. I am very sensible of Miss Stanley's kindness; but – but she must not make too much of this trifling thing."

Käthchen paused irresolute. But, after all, she had no more to say. She could not appeal to him, she could not beg of him, as a favour, to accept Miss Stanley's invitation: Käthchen also had a little pride; so she civilly bade him good afternoon, and hoped he would have a pleasant voyage home; and set out on her way back to the house.

"Well?" said Mary, when Käthchen came into the room. But she had already seen, from the window, that her messenger was returning alone.

"Oh," said Käthchen, in an indifferent sort of fashion – and she began to gather up some samples of homespun that were strewn on the table – "he says he is going out to Heimra at once. He has sent for Big Archie. He says – he says – that he is glad if he has rendered you any little service – but you are not to think of it."

Mary's eyes had grown full of wonder. For out of these windows she could plainly see that he was still waiting on the beach: the fact being that the boy Alan had failed to find Big Archie at the inn, and had gone off to seek him throughout the cottages.

"But did you tell Mr. Ross that I wished to speak with him?" she asked.

"I said that you most particularly wished to speak with him."

"Yes – and then?"

"Then he – he begged to be excused," said Käthchen, bluntly.

Mary turned sharply away from the window, and for a second or two she was silent.

"Why did you say 'most particularly'? What right had you to give him any such message?" she demanded, with something of a cold and dignified air, but not looking towards Käthchen.

"Those were your very words, Mamie!" Käthchen protested.

"I may have said something like that – in the hurry of calling to you," Mary said, with flushed face. "But you ought to have known. You might have known it was not a message I wanted given to anyone – not to anyone. However, it is of little consequence." She advanced to the table – her head somewhat

erect. "I suppose," she said, in a matter-of-fact way, "you will be writing about those samples to the Frasers, in Inverness?"

"Yes, Mamie – you told me to."

"Very well," she continued, still with that air of unconcern; "you might say to them at the same time that we can get patchwork quilts made for them at from ten to twelve shillings the piece, if they send us the materials. That is the price I promised to the women here. And if they prefer the stockings made longer, I will have them made longer; only they must give me a little more for them – there is so much more wool and so much more work."

She glanced furtively over her shoulder: it was only now that Big Archie had made his appearance – coming down the beach to the spot at which young Ross was idly walking about.

"Käthchen," she said of a sudden, with something of piteous vexation in her tone, "are you certain you said 'most particularly'? – are you quite certain? – I – I did not mean it – I was in a hurry – you did not say 'most particularly,' did you? At the same time," she went on, with an abrupt affectation of carelessness, "it is of very little consequence – no consequence whatever: the only thing is that the Highlanders appear to have odd manners – and that again, as I say, is a matter of perfect indifference. Don't forget to mention the patchwork quilts and the stockings."

But Kate Glendinning rose and went to the window. By this time Donald Ross, Big Archie, and the young lad were all in the dinghy, on their way out to the lugger.

"There is something strange, Mamie," Käthchen said,

thoughtfully. "I cannot imagine what made him refuse to come along to this house – and refuse with such embarrassment. And these are not Highland manners at all. But sometimes a Highlander is too proud to speak."

They were soon to learn what all this meant. When the two young men returned from their afternoon expedition, it appeared that they had got thirteen and a half brace of grouse, and a few odds and ends – a very fair bag, considering the size of the moor and the length of time they had been out. But it was not the success of the shooting that caused Fred Stanley to come into the drawing-room with something of a gay and triumphant air.

"Well, we have caught your poaching friend at last," he said to his sister, "and I think we have sent him home with a flea in his ear. I knew we should corner him sooner or later, in spite of his cunning. And a very pretty trick it was – to plan this insurrectionary meeting for the Twelfth, so that we should be kept away from the hill, keepers and all. But it didn't work, you see; for we lost no time in getting up to the Corrie Bhreag, and there he was, sure enough. And very little he had to say for himself – not a word! – but I had something to say to him; and I don't think we shall be troubled with his presence about Lochgarra for some little time to come."

"Are you speaking of Mr. Ross?" said Mary, with a certain calmness of manner that did not quite conceal her alarm.

"I should think I was!"

"And what did you find him doing?"

"I found him on the moor – where he had no right to be; and if the rest of the gang managed to hide themselves or to get safe away, well, I did not care much about that; he was there to answer for them; and so we had it out. Yes, I may say we had it out."

Mary turned to Frank Meredyth.

"Mr. Meredyth, what is all this about? What happened? Did you find Mr. Ross shooting on the moor?"

"Well, no," said Meredyth, with something of disquiet, for he was now placed in a most unenviable position. "The fact is, it would be difficult to bring any definite charge against him; for he was coming down from the direction of the Glen Orme forest, and when we first saw him he was following an old hill-path that everybody has the right to use – so he says. No, he wasn't shooting – not then, certainly; nor did we see any one with him: but as regards Fred's suspicions – well, you know, I have said before, that when you imagine there is poaching going on, you see it in every circumstance."

"What was he doing up there at all?" the younger man broke in. "Why, he had no defence to make. He had not a word to say for himself. It's all very well to be high and mighty: you won't account for your actions to any body – no, of course not, when you can't without convicting yourself!"

"I suppose he had a gun with him?" said she, still addressing Frank Meredyth.

"Well, no; he had not," Meredyth confessed, looking somewhat anxious and disconcerted.

"A game-bag, at least? and a dog?" she went on; "or something that entitled you to suspect him?"

"Oh, no, not at all. The truth is, he was simply coming down the strath, and he had nothing under his arm but a walking-stick."

"Oh, indeed," said she; and she drew herself up a little proudly. "Very well. You meet a stranger – no, not a stranger – but one of my friends, whom you have seen under my roof, and he is walking along a public footpath carrying a stick in his hand. Well, and then? I want to know what happens then?"

Meredyth was grievously embarrassed.

"I am afraid there were a few hard words said – and – and I must say for Mr. Ross that he showed great forbearance and self-control. Yes, I must admit that; and also that Fred was rather too – too outspoken. I must say I rather admired Mr. Ross because of his composure; for, indeed, I thought at one time – well, it was a very awkward meeting. When there is bad blood, you see – when one suspects poaching – everything points that way."

"Oh, I am responsible for everything that occurred!" Fred Stanley broke in again, impetuously. "Meredyth had nothing to do with it – nothing at all! And I tell you I spoke plainly. I thought the time for pretence and hypocrisy had gone by; I thought it was time my gentleman-poacher should understand we weren't going to be made fools of any longer. Oh, I spoke plainly enough, if that is what you want to find out!" continued this confident lad, who seemed to be rather vain of his achievement. "I told him we had had quite enough of him about Lochgarra – quite

enough of him, and his scringe-nets, and his thieving of salmon, and heaving of stones into the pools. I told him we wanted this place to ourselves now. I recommended him to keep to that small island out there – "

"It is infamous – it is shameless!" said Mary Stanley – and the beautiful, proud face had grown suddenly pale, and there was a curious indignant vibration in her voice. "Do you know what that man has done for me, this very day? What does he value most in the world – what remains to him of all the possessions which his family used to hold – what but the devotion and affection with which these people about here regard him? And he risked it all – for my sake! He took my side – against his own people! They were appealed to by everything that could tempt them; and they had been taught to regard me as their enemy; and who knows what might have happened if he had not stepped in, and confronted them, and said – 'No.' He has forgiven the injuries, the irreparable injuries, my family have done him and his; he has met me with friendliness at every turn – and always keeping out of the way and claiming no thanks for it; and now the return he gets is – insult! – and insult that he would scorn to answer." She went on, with increasing indignation: "Shooting and fishing! What do I care for the shooting and fishing! I would rather have every fish in the river and every bird on the hill destroyed than that the disgrace of such ingratitude should have fallen on this house!" She paused – hesitated – her lips began to quiver. "I – I beg your pardon, Mr. Meredyth – I am sorry you should have met

with any annoyance to-day." And the next second, and in despite of herself, she had burst into a passionate fit of weeping; while with the proud head bent, her handkerchief covering her eyes, and her frame shaken with sobbing, she left the room. Instantly Käthchen went with her – leaving silence behind.

It was about half an hour thereafter that the dinner-gong sounded upward from the big, empty, echoing hall. Käthchen came down to the drawing-room.

"Miss Stanley would rather that you did not wait for her," said she to the two gentlemen. And therewith Käthchen also withdrew.

CHAPTER II
A SUMMONS

"What can I do, Käthchen? What can I do?" she was saying, in accents almost of despair; and in her agitation she was walking up and down before the windows, glancing out from time to time towards the far island that was now shining in the morning sunlight, while the driven blue sea was springing white along its rocky shores. "What can I do? What atonement can I make? Or is it quite hopeless? Is he to be sent away as a stranger, without a word of excuse, or apology, or appeal?" And then she said: "Käthchen, surely there is some fatality in it, that this young man, who has heaped kindness on me since ever I came to this place – but always keeping aloof in a strange, proud way, as if to avoid the possibility of thanks – surely there is some fatality that he should receive nothing but insult and wrong at our hands. First, my uncle – now, my brother – "

"At all events," said Kate Glendinning, boldly, "I don't see why you should torture your mind about it, Mamie. It has been none of your doing. You are not responsible for what your uncle may have done; and if Fred has spoken in a moment of anger, well, I don't suppose Mr. Ross will prove to be so unforgiving."

"It is the whole family he must think of, Käthchen!" Mary broke in bitterly. "I shouldn't wonder if he hated the very name of

Stanley! What a despicable race he must think us! But I suppose there is an end now. He has borne too much already: this puts a climax to it. Unforgiving? Why, even if I could persuade Fred to go out to Heimra and offer him an apology, he would treat it with scorn – and rightly too. I know he would!"

The shrewd Käthchen, though she did not say so, had her doubts on this score. In the dim recesses of her consciousness there was an echo of two lines from 'Maud' —

> 'Peace, angry spirit, and let him be!
> Has not his sister smiled on me?'

And she fancied, for reasons of her own, that if the headstrong lad could be brought to ask for pardon, the somewhat haughty features of the young owner of Heimra would not long remain stern and implacable. But she dared not reveal those reasons, even as she dared not repeat those two lines. She was a prudent lass; and careful not to presume unwarily.

Of a sudden Mary said, in her impetuous way —

"Käthchen, I will take the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn!"

Kate Glendinning looked up, startled.

"Yes," the young proprietress said, with decision. "After breakfast you and I must drive away out and see Mr. Watson. If he will give up Meall-na-Fearn on the same terms as Meall-na-Cruagan, good and well; the sheep must go; and the crofters can have the pasturage divided amongst them. I suppose," she

added, with something of embarrassment in the clear-shining eyes, "some one would be sure to – to carry the news – out to Heimra? Or a line, perhaps – you might have occasion to send out to him – "

"Mamie!" said Käthchen, in warm protest. "What are you thinking of? Is that the atonement you want to make? Do you mean to cut down Mr. Watson's farm still further just to please Donald Ross? Why, it is madness! To begin with, it would not please him – not in the least; he has told you that you have already been far too generous; and I don't know what he would think of such a needless and useless sacrifice."

"Oh, you think he would not approve?" said Mary, slowly. She was now standing at one of the windows, looking out towards the distant island beyond the wide blue plain of the sea.

"I am pretty sure he would not," Käthchen responded, "especially if he fancied it was done to propitiate him: it would put him in a very awkward position. But I'll tell you what I should do if I were in your place, Mamie – "

"Yes," she said, instantly turning from the window. "What is it? Is there anything I can do, Käthchen? It seems so terrible – and so shameful; and here am I helpless. And then he is so proud – yes, proud and disdainful; I have said it before; only this time he has an ample right to be."

"Well, Mamie, if I were you, I would simply take no notice of what happened yesterday afternoon;" this was Käthchen's advice. "I would assume that the friendly relations between him and you

were precisely as they always had been."

"Yes, but how to let him know that that is what I am thinking?" said Mary eagerly – and rather piteously withal.

"I would send him a note," said the intrepid Käthchen.

"About what?"

"About anything!"

"Shall I ask him to come over and dine with us?" Mary asked, rather nervously.

"Well, no: that would be useless; he would not accept – at present," Käthchen made answer. "But indeed, Mamie, I would not send him any invitation, nor would I say anything that needed an answer: I should write so that he might answer or not just as he pleased."

"Yes, yes," said Mary, with some animation. "Your advice is excellent, Käthchen. I will write at once. And about what? Oh, about kelp. I have got all the information I wanted about the burning of kelp; and I will tell him that any time he comes over to the mainland I should like to show him the report." And then as abruptly she discarded this idea. "No. Kelp is too common-place. It would be like asking for his advice about something connected with the estate; and I want him to understand that I can get on by myself. Oh, I'll tell you, Käthchen! – the photographs! – the photographs I promised to send to Mrs. Armour. You know how proud he was of the old woman's coming all the way from Canada to have but a glimpse of Young Donald; and I could see how he was pleased by the little attentions I was able to show her – quite

grateful he seemed – though you know he doesn't say much."

She was all excitement now, and as happy and sanguine as hitherto she had been despondent. She went and got writing materials forthwith, and hastily, and yet with some consideration, penned this note: —

> "Lochgarra House, Tuesday Morning.
>
> "Dear Mr. Ross, – I do not know whether I told you that, before Mrs. Armour left to return to Canada, I promised to send her a series of photographs of Lochgarra and the neighbourhood. I am arranging to have a photographer come through from Inverness, and any time that you happen to be over here I should be exceedingly obliged if you would spare me a few minutes to let me know what places would be likely to prove most interesting to her.
>
> *"Yours sincerely,*
> *"MARY STANLEY."*

"Now, you see," she said, as she rather triumphantly handed the letter to Käthchen, "that demands nothing. He does not need to reply unless he happens to have plenty of time and nothing else to do. It merely shows that, as far as I am concerned, I don't consider that anything has occurred to disturb our friendly relations. It was so clever of you to think of it, Käthchen! And I must send word to Big Archie that I shall want him and his boat. I'm afraid it's too rough to try the steam-launch. I'm so much obliged to you, Käthchen, for thinking about it!"

Indeed, she was quite joyous and radiant. Her keen remorse, and shame, and piteous despair seemed wholly to have fled; she

was possessed with an audacious confidence; a sort of gratitude towards all the world shone in her eyes. And Käthchen, who had studied this young woman closely, and who was capable of drawing conclusions, knew perfectly the origin of this buoyancy of spirit: the letter Mary had just written demanded no answer, it is true, but none the less was she in her heart convinced that an answer – an answer confirming all her best anticipations – would be forthcoming, and that without delay. Big Archie was bidden to haste and get his lugger ready: he was to set out for Heimra at once.

Kate Glendinning was not the only one in this house who could draw conclusions, or at least form suspicions. When the two gentlemen returned that evening from the hill, they found the letters and newspapers that had arrived by the mid-day post spread out on the hall-table; and they began to glance at addresses and tear open envelopes. Fred Stanley was soon satisfied; he went off to his room to change for dinner; but his elder companion remained – holding a letter in his hand, and apparently much concerned about something. At this moment Käthchen appeared, passing across to the door leading out into the garden; and the instant he caught sight of her his eyes seemed to light up with interest. Here was a friend in need.

"Miss Glendinning," said he, in something of an anxious undertone, "could you give me a couple of minutes? Are you going into the garden? May I come with you? I want to ask you to do me a great service – how great I can hardly tell you."

Käthchen was surprised; for this trim, brisk, bronze-cheeked, shrewd-eyed sportsman generally took things in a very happy-go-lucky, imperturbable fashion. But her instant conjecture was a natural one: "Be sure this is about Mamie!" she said to herself.

Well, he accompanied her down the stone steps and into the garden, where she began to employ herself in cutting flowers for the dining-room table, while she listened attentively enough.

"The fact is," said he, "I have just had a letter from home, with no very good news. My father, who is an old man, has been an invalid for a great many years, varying in health from time to time; but now it seems he has had a very bad attack of asthma along with his other ailments, and the doctors have ordered him off to Bournemouth – "

"I am very sorry," said Käthchen, as in duty bound.

"And – I have received an intimation that I may be telegraphed for – I might have to leave here at a moment's notice almost." He hesitated for a second or so. "Miss Glendinning," he said, "you see how I am situated: I may be called away at any moment – with something that is of great importance to me left unsettled. I have been living in a fool's paradise; I thought there was plenty of time. And then, again, I did not care to confide in any one. But now I am going to appeal to you. Will you tell me something in strictest confidence – something you are likely to know? It might save your friend – you can guess whom I mean – much embarrassment, even pain; and it would be the greatest favour you could possibly confer on me."

And now Käthchen knew her surmise was correct; and perhaps she may have been inclined to think that there was something incongruous, something even humorous, in this ordinarily cool and firm-nerved person appearing to be afflicted by the hesitation of an anxious lover, only that she was also aware of the gravity of the situation. For tragic things may happen even to the steeled.

"Miss Glendinning," said he, "I want you to tell me if there is anything between Mr. Ross and Miss Stanley?"

Well, this was a frank challenge; and she answered it as frankly.

"I do not think there is," she said; "but I think there might be at any moment. That is only my impression; and I may be quite wrong; and indeed I have no right to say so – "

"But I have appealed to you as a friend, to do me this great favour," said he; and then he paused for a second. "The fact is," he went on, as if with some unwillingness, "I have noticed one or two odd things – Miss Stanley's indignation with her brother if he said anything against Mr. Ross – and the painful scene of yesterday evening – these things might lead one to conjecture – "

"Oh, but I'm sure there is nothing between them – nothing at present, at least," said Käthchen, with some earnestness; for this assurance she could honestly give him; and when did a perplexed and troubled lover ever appeal in vain to a woman's heart? "There is nothing between them at present, I am certain of that; and whether there ever may be, who can tell? Both of them have

peculiar natures. Both of them are proud; and she, besides that, is wilful and impulsive; while he is reserved – and – and you might almost think cold – only that I imagine his studiously keeping away from her, and treating her with a kind of distant civility, has some meaning and intention in it. I don't think he would like to become the slave of any woman; and she – well, she is very independent, too. And then both of them are very peculiarly situated: there is the old-standing feud between the two families; it must have been hard on him and on his mother to have strangers coming into the neighbourhood, tearing down the old landmarks. There are things that the Highland nature can never forget; and Mary knows that well; more than once she has said to me, 'Käthchen, there are wrongs that can never be undone; I can never rebuild Castle Heimra.'"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand," said he, rather absently; "and yet Ross does not seem to bear any resentment – not against her. No, nor against any one belonging to her. I must say for him that his forbearance yesterday towards Fred Stanley was most remarkable: that was another thing that struck me as peculiar. And yet you say there is nothing between him and Miss Stanley?"

"Nothing, I am certain," Käthchen assured him again.

"I am so awfully obliged to you!" he said, with some little expression of relief; and yet he was thoughtful and silent as they walked back to the house – Käthchen having got all the flowers she wanted.

That night, after dinner, when the two young ladies retired to

the drawing-room, Mary seemed somewhat disturbed.

"Don't you think it rather strange, Käthchen," she said, "that Big Archie brought no message back from Heimra? I don't mean an answer. I don't mean an answer to my note. That was not necessary – it was hardly to be expected. But why has he not come to say he delivered my letter?"

She went to one of the windows, and pulled aside part of the blind. The night had turned out rather dark and squally; and there were spots of rain on the glass that caught the light of the lamps within.

"I should like to see Big Archie," said she, with a vague restlessness. And then of a sudden she made this abrupt proposal: "Käthchen, won't you come down with me into the village? Barbara says the gentlemen have gone into the billiard-room, for there is a threatening of rain; but we could put on waterproofs, and run away down there and back, without anything being known of it."

"Is it worth while, Mamie?" Käthchen remonstrated. "He must have delivered your note!"

"Yes; but it is so strange there should be no message of any kind!" said Mary. And then she instantly added, changing her tone: "Of course, it is not at all strange. Only – only, Big Archie sometimes takes a glass of whisky, you know; and he might have got some answer that he has forgotten – perhaps a note that he has left in his pocket – "

"Oh, if you like, I will go with you," said Käthchen at once,

rather welcoming a little bit of adventure; and forthwith both of them hurried away to get their waterproofs.

The night was dark and blustering; the ordinarily clear twilight of these northern regions was obscured by heavy clouds; and the wind that blew in from the sea brought with it a sense of moisture that promised to become actual rain. The two black figures made their way with little difficulty in the direction of the orange lights of the village, the unseen sea washing up on the beach close by them. Neither spoke; but both walked quickly; perhaps they wanted to be back at Lochgarra House before their absence should be known.

Then, just as they were getting near to the inn, Kate suddenly put her hand on her friend's arm. Ahead of them were two other figures, as black as themselves, but looming larger through the dusk.

"That is Big Archie," said Käthchen, in a whisper, "and isn't the other Hector? – yes, I am sure that is Hector!"

At this moment the two men disappeared.

"I know where they have gone," Mary said promptly. "They have gone into the tap-room behind. Well, we will follow, in case the people in the inn should deny them. Come along, Käthchen, I know the way."

The two young women left the main street, crossed a stable-yard, and, guided by the dull glow of a window, went up to a door, which Mary entered. The next moment they were gazing into a small sanded parlour, where Gilleasbuig Mor and his friend the

keeper were standing: indeed, the two men had not had time to sit down nor yet to order anything to drink. The oil-lamp on the table shed a feeble light, but it was quite sufficient to show that Hector, thus caught, was looking terribly guilty; while the great, heavy-shouldered fisherman, whose deep-set grey eyes under the bushy eyebrows seemed to say that he had already had a glass, instantly came to his companion's help.

"Aw, well now," Archie said, in his plaintive Argyllshire accent, "iss it Miss Stanley herself that would be coming in here – indeed, indeed! – and Hector, the honest lad, chist feenished up with ahl his work – oh, aye – the guns ahl cleaned, and the dogs fed, and everything ready for the chentlemen to-morrow – and me coming bye from the Camus Bheag, and says I, 'Hector, will you come along with me and hef a dram when your work is feenished?' And Miss Stanley need not be thinking there wass any more in our minds than that; for Hector is a fine lad, and a fine keeper, and what harm will a dram do to anyone when ahl the work is done?"

"Sit down, Archie – sit down, Hector!" said Mary, quite good-naturedly. "I saw you come in this way, Archie, and I merely wished to ask you what happened at Heimra."

"Aw, Heimra," said Archie, collecting his thoughts – and his English. "Iss it at Heimra? Aw, well, now, Martha is a ferry nice woman, and she wass giving me some bread and cheese, ay, and a glass of spirits the like of it is not ahlways – a good woman Martha – '

"Yes, but my note, Archie," said Mary. "The note you took out: I suppose you gave it to Mr. Ross? And he did not say anything? Well, there was no need for an answer – none in the least – "

"Aw, the letter?" said Archie. "Well, I wass not seeing Mr. Ross at ahl, for he wass aweh up on the north side of the island, setting snares for the rabbits."

"Oh, you did not see Mr. Ross?" said Mary, quickly. "He could not possibly have sent any answer?" She seemed greatly pleased – as Käthchen observed. "No, of course, he could not send an answer if he was away at the other end of the island." Then she turned to Hector; and the tall, swarthy, brown-bearded keeper perceived that the fair young Englishwoman – the Baintighearna – had no mind to rebuke him or to be in any way angry with him. "Why, Hector," she said, quite pleasantly, "that is a very strange thing, that he should go snaring rabbits: why doesn't he shoot them?"

"Mr. Ross, mem," said Hector, in his grave and respectful fashion, "he does not care much about shooting. And the rabbits, if they are not kept down, would do a dale of mischief on a smahl island like that."

"He is not fond of shooting, then? No; I think he told me so himself." Then, with one of her sudden impulses, she said – "Come, Hector, let me know what all this is about poaching on this place. Ever since I came here I have heard of all kinds of rumours and charges and suspicions; and I want to know the

truth. I shan't blame anybody. I want to know the actual truth. Tell me frankly. It isn't such an important thing, after all. I only want to know what is happening around us."

The tall keeper looked concerned – not to say alarmed: the violent scene of the day before was fresh in his mind. But the big, good-natured giant from Cantire broke in.

"Aw, he is a fine lad, Hector, Miss Stanley may be sure of that; and there's no mich poaching going on about this country-side – at least, not about Lochgarra whatever. It's myself that wass hearing Hector seh that if he wass catching the Gillie Ciotach with a gun, he would brek the gun over his head."

"Gillie Ciotach?" said Mary. "I know him – a wild-looking young fellow, with a mark across his forehead. Well, is he a poacher, Hector?"

"It is in this way, mem," Hector said, slowly and carefully; "there's very little poaching about Lochgarra, as Archie says, and Hugh and myself we know it well; but there's some of the young lads, ay, and some of the older men, too, that if they came across a salmon, or a few sea-trout, or a hare, they would be for taking it out to Heimra, and slipping round by the back-door, and Martha there to take the present. Mr. Ross, he does not pay attention to such things; for he is ahlways having a salmon, or a capercailzie, or a box of grouse sent him by the big families that he knows, when their friends are up for the shooting; and he will believe anything that Martha says; and he pays no more heed to such things."

"Yes, but, Hector, what I want you to tell me is this," she interposed – and she spoke with a certain air of proud confidence – "what I want you to tell me distinctly is this: do you mean to say that Mr. Ross himself would take a gun or a fishing-rod and go where he had no right to go, either fishing or shooting?"

It was a challenge; and Hector met it unflinchingly. He said, in his serious way —

"Oh, no, mem – no, no: there is not anyone about here that would think such a thing of Mr. Ross."

Mary turned to Käthchen, with a quick, triumphant glance. Then she addressed herself again to Hector.

"Well, sit down, and have a chat with your friend, Hector," said she, very pleasantly. "We shan't interrupt you any longer. And if now and again one of the lads about here should be taking out a little present of fish or game to old Martha, for the housekeeping, well, that is a trifling matter; and I dare say she gives them a glass of whiskey for their trouble. And, Archie, any other time you go out to Heimra with a message from me, mind you come back and tell me whether there is an answer or not, even when I am not expecting an answer, because that makes everything certain and correct. So good-night to you both – good-night! – good-night!" And therewith the two young ladies, who, even in the dull light of this little sanded parlour, had formed such a curious contrast to those two big, swarthy, heavily-bearded men, withdrew, and shut the door after them, and set out for home through the darkness and the drizzling rain.

Next morning Mary said, with a casual glance out towards Eilean Heimra —

"Käthchen, don't you think, if you lived on that island, you would rather have a good-sized steam-launch than any sailing-boat? It would be so much more handy – ready at a moment's notice almost – and taking up so much less time, if you wanted to send a message to the mainland. I suppose Mr. Ross has to think twice before telling his men to get the yacht ready, or even that big lugsail boat."

But as the day wore on there was no sign of either yacht or lugger coming away from Heimra; the grey and squally sea remained empty; indeed, towards the afternoon, the wind freshened up into something like half a gale, and it grew to be a matter of certainty that Donald Ross would not seek to communicate with the shore. Mary was not disheartened. On the contrary, her face wore the same happy look – that Frank Meredyth could not quite understand. He had become observant and thoughtful: not about grouse.

The following morning broke with a much more cheerful aspect.

"Käthchen," said Mary, before they went down to breakfast together, "don't you think that any time Mr. Ross comes across to the mainland he might as well walk along here for lunch, instead of going to the inn? Talking to us should interest him as much as talking to that soft-headed John, the policeman, or to the sulky Peter Grant, or even to the sing-song Minister. And it would be

very pleasant for us, too, with the gentlemen away on the moor all day."

But again the slow hours of the day passed; and, whatever may have been her secret hopes, her anxious fears, or even, at times, her disposition to be proudly resentful, that width of rough blue water gave no answer to her surreptitiously questioning gaze. There was a fresh westerly breeze blowing; either the smart little cutter or the more cumbrous lugger could have made an easy and rapid passage. However, neither brown sail nor white sail appeared outside the distant headland; and so the afternoon drew on towards evening; and here were the sportsmen come down from the hill, and the dressing-bell about to sound.

After dinner, when the two young ladies were alone together, Mary said – with a curious affectation of indifference —

"I did not ask for an answer, Käthchen. Oh, certainly not. There was no answer needed – but still – it seems to me he might have acknowledged the receipt of my note. Of course I am rather anxious to know on what terms we are – naturally – and – and naturally I should like to know whether he absolves me – " She was silent for a moment. When she spoke again she was more honest: there was something of a proud, hurt feeling in her tone. "I do think he might have sent me a message. Don't you, Käthchen? Either yesterday morning or to-day – the whole of to-day has been fine weather. I went out of my way to make the first overtures – after – after what happened. I held out the olive-branch. It seems to me that common courtesy would suggest

some little acknowledgment: one is not used to being treated in this way – "

"Perhaps to-morrow – " suggested Käthchen, vaguely.

"Oh, if he is not in a hurry, neither am I," said she, with a sudden air of haughty unconcern; and she would have no more said.

Nay, from this moment she seemed to dismiss Donald Ross from her mind. When, on the following day, Eilean Heimra remained as mute and unresponsive as before, she made no remark to Käthchen; she resolutely dismissed an involuntary habit she had formed of scanning the space of sea intervening between the island and the coast; and if Käthchen mentioned Mr. Ross's name, she would either not reply at all, or reply with a cold indifference, as much as to say, "Who is the stranger whom you speak of?" All the day long she busied herself with her multifarious duties, and was particularly cheerful; in the evening she showed herself most complaisant towards the two young men who were her guests. She talked of giving a ball to the keepers, the gillies, and their friends; and wondered whether there was anywhere a barn big enough for the purpose.

So time went by; and these four young people occupying Lochgarra House appeared to be as merry and happy as though they had belonged to a certain little band of Florentines of the fourteenth century. For Mary was not always deep-buried in her industrial schemes. Sometimes she and Kate Glendinning would go away up to join the sportsmen at lunch-time; and thereafter,

perched high on these sterile and lonely altitudes, she would set to work to add to a series she was forming of sea-views and coast-views – drawings in most of which the horizon-line was close up to the top of the sheet. It is true that in these spacious sketches she had sometimes to include the island of Heimra; but no mention was made of Donald Ross; it was as if he had gone away, and for ever, into some unknown clime. Even Fred Stanley was almost ready to believe that the poaching had ceased; and so there was peace in the land.

But there came a thunder-clap into this idyllic quiet. One evening, when the two young men returned from their long day on the hill, there was a telegram among the letters on the hall-table. It was for Frank Meredyth. He tore open the envelope.

"I was afraid of it," he said to his companion. "I must be off, Fred, by the mail-car to-morrow morning. Very sorry, old chap, to have to leave you."

"I hope it is nothing serious," young Stanley put in, with his grey eyes grown grave.

"They don't say anything very definite," was the reply. "Only I am summoned, and I must go."

"Then I will go with you," said the other promptly, "as far as London. This just decides it. I'll accept Nugent's invitation, after all; and if he has started, I'll pick him up at Marseilles. We've seen pretty well what the moor is like; and perhaps some other time my sister asks us down, we may wait on and have a try for a stag or two. Very sorry, though, you must go."

Dinner that evening, in view of this summons, was rather a sombre affair: it was Käthchen who, when the young men subsequently made their appearance in the drawing-room, suggested they should all go out for a stroll up to the top of the Minard road. She thought this little excursion would remove some of the prevailing constraint. Besides, it promised to be a beautiful moonlight night; and from the summit of the hill they would have a view of the wide southern seas, with the black headlands running out into the shimmering pathway of silver.

Well, the expedition, so far as pictorial effects were concerned, was entirely successful; but it was not moonlight that was in Frank Meredyth's mind. He was going away on the morrow; he did not know what might happen in his absence; and he thought his departure was a fair and reasonable excuse for his revealing to Mary Stanley certain hopes and aspirations that had gradually, and for some long time back, been taking possession of him. On their way back to the house Fred and Käthchen were walking on in front; the night was still, so that half-murmured words were enough; the surroundings lent a certain charm. And so it came about that Frank Meredyth asked Mary to become his wife.

Now it cannot be said that the language in which this proposition was couched was quite in accordance with these poetical accessories of moonlit vale, and larch wood, and hill; for the average young Englishman, however honest and sincere he may be, does not express himself fluently on such occasions;

probably he would be ashamed of himself if he could and did. Nevertheless, a proposal of marriage, however stumblingly and awkwardly conveyed, is a very serious thing to a young woman; and Mary, startled and frightened, had only the one immediate and overwhelming desire – to postpone the terrible necessity of giving a definite answer. For it was all too bewildering. She wanted to think. To tell the truth, Frank Meredyth's wooing had not been too open and avowed. A man of the world in other things, in this he had been a little shy – one touch of nature among a thousand conventionalities. Then, again, was not a refusal a very cruel thing, that should be administered gently?

"Oh, Mr. Meredyth," she said, in a very low and rather breathless voice, "I think – I think – this is hardly the time – "

"But surely it is!" said he. "For I am going away to-morrow morning. And I don't know when I may see you again. And I should like to take with me some little word of hope – something to remember – "

"Did you see that hare?" Fred Stanley called to them, looking back for a moment.

Meredyth did not pay much heed to the hare.

"Perhaps I have asked you too abruptly," he went on, in the same hurried and confused undertone. "Perhaps I am asking too much – that you should say something definite all at once. Very well: I will not press for an answer – I will wait – I will wait – "

They were emerging from the shadow of the larch trees; before them was an open space of gravel, white in the moonlight,

and beyond that rose the grey walls and turrets of Lochgarra House.

"Only tell me this," said he, in a still lower voice, "tell me if there is any one before me. I have hesitated about speaking earlier because I imagined certain things – perhaps I was mistaken – at least you will tell me that – tell me if there is some one else – "

"No," said Mary, as they crossed that space of white moonlight, and perhaps she spoke a little proudly. "That – at least – I can assure you – "

"No one?" he said, eagerly, in the same undertone.

But here they were at the house – with Fred and Käthchen waiting for them on the grey stone terrace: these two had turned to look at the wonderful beauty of the night.

CHAPTER III
A FORECAST

Now, among the numerous undertakings on which the young proprietress of Lochgarra had set her heart was the establishment of a Public Reading-room and Free Library; and to that end she had planned and built – employing local labour only – a large, long, one-storeyed erection, of a solid and substantial cast, fit to withstand the buffetings of the western storms. The interior was as simple and unpretentious as the exterior; there was nothing beyond a strip of platform, a series of plain wooden benches, a few deal tables and chairs, and a small space partitioned off as kitchen. The rules and regulations, of her own sketching out, were likewise of an artless nature. The place was to be open to the whole community. Tea and coffee at cheap rates were to be procurable between five and seven a.m., and from seven till nine in the evening: the morning hours were for the benefit of bachelor workmen on their way to work, or of fishermen coming in cold and wet after a night at sea. Although reading was the ostensible aim, women were free to bring their knitting or sewing: good lamps would be provided, and a good fire in winter. There were to be no set entertainments of any kind; but on certain evenings such of the young people as could sing or play on any instrument would be expected to do their best for the amusement of their

neighbours. Thus far only had she drawn out her simple code; she wished to get the opinions of the villagers themselves as to minor details; and so, all being ready, there one day appeared the following modest little handbill – "On Tuesday next, at six o'clock in the evening, Miss Stanley will open the Public Reading Room for the use of the inhabitants of Lochgarra. Everyone is invited to attend."

It was on the Monday afternoon that she and Kate Glendinning went along to have a final look. Apparently all was in order; though, to be sure, the supply of books, magazines, and newspapers was as yet somewhat scanty. But it was something else that was uppermost in Mary's mind at this moment.

"You don't think me really nervous, Käthchen?" said she, in a half-laughing and yet concerned way.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.