

WILLIAM BLACK

A PRINCESS OF
THULE

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A Princess of Thule

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A Princess of Thule

PART I

CHAPTER I. “LOCHABER NO MORE.”

ON a small headland of the distant island of Lewis, an old man stood looking out on a desolate waste of rain-beaten sea. It was a wild and wet day. From out of the lowering Southwest fierce gusts of wind were driving up volumes and flying rags of clouds, and sweeping onward at the same time the gathering waves that fell hissing and thundering on the shore. Far as the eye could reach, the sea and the air and the sky seemed to be one indistinguishable mass of whirling and hurrying vapor, as if beyond this point there were no more land, but only wind and water, and the confused and awful voice of their strife.

The short, thick-set, powerfully-built man who stood on this solitary point paid little attention to the rain that ran off the peak of his sailor's cap, or to the gusts of wind that blew about his bushy gray beard. He was still following, with an eye accustomed to pick out objects far at sea, one speck of purple that was now fading into the gray mist of the rain; and the longer he looked the less it became, until the mingled sea and sky showed only the smoke that the great steamer left in its wake. As he stood there, motionless and regardless of everything around him, did he cling to the fancy that he could still trace out the path of the vanished ship? A little while before it had passed almost close to him. He had watched it steam out of Stornoway Harbor. As the sound of the engines came nearer and the big boat went by, so that he could have almost called to it, there was no sign of emotion on the hard and stern face, except, perhaps, that the lips were held firm and a sort of frown appeared over the eyes. He saw a tiny white handkerchief being waved to him from the deck of the vessel; and he said, almost as though he were addressing some one there:

“My good little girl!”

But in the midst of that roaring of the sea and the wind how could any such message be delivered? And already the steamer was away from the land, standing out to the lonely plain of waters, and the sound of the engines had ceased, and the figures on the deck had grown faint and visionary. But still there was that one speck of white visible; and the man knew that a pair of eyes that had many a time looked into his own – as if with a faith that such intercommunion could never be broken – were now trying, through overflowing and blinding tears, to send him a last look of farewell.

The gray mists of the rain gathered within their folds the big vessel and all the beating hearts it contained, and the fluttering of that little token disappeared with it. All that remained was the sea, whitened by the rushing of the wind and the thunder of waves on the beach. The man, who had been gazing so long down into the Southeast, turned his face landward and set out to walk over a tract of wet grass and sand toward a road that ran near by. There was a large wagonette of varnished oak and a pair of small powerful horses waiting for him there; and having dismissed the boy who had been in charge, he took the reins and got up. But even yet the fascination of the sea and of that sad farewell was upon him, and he turned once more, as if, now that sight could yield him no further tidings, he would send her one more word of good-by. “My poor little Sheila!” That was all he said; and then he turned to the horses and sent them on, with his head down to escape the rain, and a look on his face like that of a dead man.

As he drove through the town of Stornoway the children playing within the shelter of the cottage doors called to each other in a whisper and said: "That is the King of Borva."

But the elderly people said to each other, with a shake of the head, "It iss a bad day, this day, for Mr. Mackenzie, that he will be going home to an empty house. And it will be a ferry bad thing for the poor folk of Borva, and they will know a great difference, now that Miss Sheila iss gone away, and there is nobody – not anybody at all – left in the island to tek the side of the poor folk."

He looked neither to the right nor to the left, though he was known to many of the people, as he drove away from the town into the heart of the lonely and desolate land. The wind had so far died down, and the rain had considerably lessened, but the gloom of the sky was deepened by the drawing on of the afternoon, and lay heavily over the dreary wastes of moor and hill. What a wild and dismal country was this which lay before and all around him, now that the last traces of human occupation were passed! There was not a cottage, not a stone wall, not a fence, to break the monotony of the long undulations of moorland, which in the distance rose into a series of hills that were black under the darkened sky. Down from those mountains ages ago, glaciers had slowly crept to eat out hollows in the plains below; and now in those hollows were lonely lakes, with not a tree to break the line of their melancholy shores. Everywhere around were the traces of this glacier drift – great gray boulders of gneiss fixed fast into the black peat moss, or set amid the browns and greens of the heather. The only sound to be heard in this wilderness of rock and morass was the rushing of various streams, rain-swollen and turbid, that plunged down their narrow channels to the sea.

The rain now ceased altogether, but the mountains in the far south had grown still darker, and to the fishermen passing by the coast it must have seemed as though the black peaks were holding converse with the lowering clouds, and that the silent moorland beneath was waiting for the first roll of the thunder. The man who was driving along this lonely route sometimes cast a glance down toward this threatening of a storm, but he paid little heed to it. The reins lay loose on the backs of the horses, and at their own pace they followed, hour after hour, the rising and falling road that led through the moorland and past the gloomy lakes. He may have recalled mechanically the names of those stretches of water – The Lake of the Sheiling, the Lake of the Oars, the Lake of the Fine Sand, and so forth – to measure the distance he had traversed; but he seemed to pay little attention to the objects around him, and it was with a glance of something like surprise, that he suddenly found himself overlooking that great sea-loch on the western side of the island in which was his home.

He drove down the hill to the solitary little inn of Gara-na-hina. At the door, muffled up in a warm woolen plaid, stood a young girl, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and diffident in look.

"Mr. Mackenzie," she said, with that peculiar and pleasant intonation that marks the speech of the Hebridean who has been taught English in the schools, "it was Miss Sheila wrote to me to Suainabost, and she said I might come down from Suainabost and see if I can be of any help to you in the house."

The girl was crying, although the blue eyes looked bravely through the tears as if to disprove the fact.

"Ay, my good lass," he said, putting his hand gently on her head, "and it wass Sheila wrote to you?"

"Yes, sir, and I hef come down from Suainabost."

"It is a lonely house you will be going to," he said, absently.

"But Miss Sheila said I wass – I wass to –" But here the young girl failed in her effort to explain that Miss Sheila had asked her to go down to make the house less lonely. The elderly man in the wagonette seemed scarcely to notice that she was crying; he bade her come up beside him; and when he had got her into the wagonette he left some message with the innkeeper, who had come to the door, and drove off again.

They drove along the high land that overlooks a portion of Loch Roag, with its wonderful network of islands and straits, and then they stopped on the lofty plateau of Callernish, where there was a man waiting to take the wagonette and horses.

“And you would be seeing Miss Sheila away, sir?” said the man; “and it was Duncan Macdonald will say that she will not come back no more to Borva.”

The old man with the big gray beard only frowned and passed on. He and the girl made their way down the side of the rocky hill to the shore, and here there was an open boat awaiting them. When they approached, a man considerably over six feet in height, keen-faced, gray-eyed, straight-limbed and sinewy in frame, jumped into the big and rough boat and began to get ready for their departure. There was just enough wind to catch the brown mainsail, and the King of Borva took the tiller, his henchman sitting down by the mast. And no sooner had they left the shore and stood out towards one of the channels of this arm of the sea, than the tall, spare keeper began to talk of that which made his master’s eye grow dark. “Ah, well,” he said, in the plaintive drawling of his race, “and it iss an empty house you will be going to, Mr. Mackenzie; and it iss a bad thing for us all that Miss Sheila hass gone away; and it iss many’s ta time she will hef been wiss me in this very boat – ”

“ – you, Duncan Macdonald!” cried Mackenzie, in an access of fury, “what will you talk of like that? It iss every man, woman and child on the island will talk of nothing but Sheila! I will drive my foot through the bottom of the boat if you do not hold your peace!”

The tall gillie patiently waited until his master had exhausted his passion, and then he said, as if nothing had occurred: “And it will not do much good, Mr. Mackenzie, to tek ta name o’ God in vain; and there will be much more of trinking in ta island, and it will be a great difference mirover. And she will be so far away that no one will see her no more – far away beyond ta sound of Sleat, and far away beyond Oban, as I hef heard people say. And what will she do in London, when she has no boat at all, and she will never go out to ta fishing? And I will hear people say that you will walk a whole day and never come to ta sea, and what will Miss Sheila do for that? And she will tame no more o’ ta wild ducks’ young things, and she will find out no more o’ ta nests in the rocks, and she will hef no more horns when the deer is killed, and she will go out no more to see ta cattle swim across Loch Roag when they go to ta sheilings. It will be all different, all different, now; and she will never see us no more. And it iss as bad as if you was a poor man, Mr. Mackenzie, and had to let your sons and your daughters go away to America, and never come back no more. And she ta only one in your house! And it wass the son of Mr. Macintyre, of Sutherland, he would have married her, and come to live on ta island, and not have Miss Sheila go away among strangers that doesna ken her family, and will put no store by her, no more than if she was a fisherman’s lass. It wass Miss Sheila herself had a sore heart tis morning when she went away; and she turned and she looked at Borva as the boat came away, and I said, ’Tis iss the last time Miss Sheila will be in her boat, and she will not come no more again to Borva.”

Mr. Mackenzie heard not one word or syllable of all this. The dead, passionless look had fallen over the powerful features, and the deep-set eyes were gazing, not on the actual Loch Roag before them, but on a stormy sea that lies between Lewis and Skye, and on a vessel disappearing in the midst of the rain. It was by a sort of instinct that he guided this open boat through the channels, which were now getting broader as they neared the sea, and the tall and grave-faced keeper might have kept up his garrulous talk for hours without attracting a look or a word.

It was now the dusk of the evening, and wild and strange indeed was the scene around the solitary boat as it slowly moved along. Large islands – so large that any one of them might have been mistaken for the mainland – lay over the dark waters of the sea, remote, untenanted and silent. There were no white cottages along these rocky shores; only a succession of rugged cliffs and sandy bays, but half mirrored in the sombre water below. Down in the South the mighty shoulders and peaks of Suainabhail and its sister mountains were still darker than the darkening sky; and when at length the

boat had got well out from the network of islands and fronted the broad waters of the Atlantic, the great plain of the western sea seemed already to have drawn around it the solemn mantle of the night.

“Will you go to Borvapist, Mr. Mackenzie, or will we run her into your own house?” asked Duncan – Borvapist being the name of the chief village on the island.

“I will not go on to Borvapist,” said the old man, peevishly. “Will they not have plenty to talk about at Borvapist?”

“And it iss no harm tat ta folk will speak of Miss Sheila,” said the gillie with some show of resentment: “it iss no harm tey will be sorry she is gone away – no harm at all, for it was many things tey had to thank Miss Sheila for; and now it will be all ferry different – ”

“I tell you, Duncan Macdonald, to hold your peace!” said the old man, with a savage glare of the deep-set eyes; and then Duncan relapsed into a sulky silence, and the boat held on its way.

In the gathering twilight a long gray curve of sand became visible, and into the bay thus indicated Mackenzie turned his small craft. This indentation of the island seemed as blank of human occupation as the various points and bays they had passed, but as they neared the shore a house came into sight, about half way up the slope rising from the sea to the pasture land above. There was a small stone pier jutting out at one portion of the bay, where a mass of rocks was embedded in the white sand; and here at length the boat was run in, and Mackenzie helped the young girl ashore.

The two of them, leaving the gillie to moor the little vessel that had brought them from Callernish, went silently toward the shore, and up the narrow road leading to the house. It was a square, two-storied substantial building of stone, but the stone had been liberally oiled to keep out the wet, and the blackness thus produced had not a very cheerful look. Then, on this particular evening the scant bushes surrounding the house hung limp and dark in the rain, and amid the prevailing hues of purple, blue-green and blue, the bit of scarlet coping running around the black house was wholly ineffective in relieving the general impression of dreariness and desolation.

The King of Borva walked into a large room, which was but partially lit by two candles on the table and by the blaze of a mass of peats in the stone fire-place, and threw himself into a big easy-chair. Then he suddenly seemed to recollect his companion, who was timidly standing near the door, with her shawl still around her head.

“Mairi,” he said, “go and ask them to give you some dry clothes. Your box it will not be here for half an hour yet.” Then he turned to the fire.

“But you yourself, Mr. Mackenzie, you will be ferry wet – ”

“Never mind me, my lass; go and get yourself dried.”

“But it wass Miss Sheila,” began the girl diffidently – “it wass Miss Sheila asked me – she asked me to look after you, sir – ”

With that he rose abruptly, and advanced to her and caught her by the wrist. He spoke quite quietly to her, but the girl’s eyes, looking up at the stern face, were a trifle frightened.

“You are a ferry good little girl, Mairi,” he said slowly, “and you will mind what I say to you. You will do what you like in the house, you will take Sheila’s place as much as you like, but you will mind this – not to mention her name, not once. Now go away, Mairi, and find Scarlett Macdonald, and she will give you some dry clothes; and you will tell her to send Duncan down to Borvapist, and bring up John the Piper and Alisternan-Each, and the lads of the *Nighean dubh*, if they are not gone home to Habost yet. But it iss John the Piper must come directly.”

The girl went away to seek counsel of Scarlett Macdonald, Duncan’s wife, and Mr. Mackenzie proceeded to walk up and down the big and half-lit chamber. Then he went to the cupboard, and put out on the table a number of tumblers and glasses, with two or three odd-looking bottles of Norwegian make, consisting of four semicircular tubes of glass, meeting at top and bottom, leaving the center of the vessel thus formed open. He stirred up the blazing peats in the fire-place. He brought down from a shelf a box filled with coarse tobacco, and put it on the table. But he was evidently growing impatient, and at last he put on his cap again and went out into the night.

The air blew cold in from the sea, and whistled through the bushes that Sheila had trained about the porch. There was no rain now, but a great and heavy darkness brooded overhead, and in the silence he could hear the breaking of the waves along the hard coast. But what was this other sound he heard, wild and strange in the stillness of the night – a shrill and plaintive cry that the distance softened, until it almost seemed to be the calling of a human voice? Surely those were words he heard, or was it only that the old, sad air spoke to him?

For Lochaber no more, Lochaber no more,
Maybe to return to Lochaber no more.

That was the message that came to him out of the darkness, and it seemed to him as if the sea and the night and the sky were wailing over the loss of his Sheila. He walked away from the house and up the hill behind. Led by the sound of the pipes, that grew louder and more unearthly as he approached, he found himself at length on a bit of high table-land overlooking the sea, where Sheila had had a rude bench of iron and wood fixed into the rock. On this bench sat a little old man, humpbacked and bent, and with long white hair falling down to his shoulders. He was playing the pipes – not wildly and fiercely, as if he were at a drinking-bout of the lads come home from the Caithness fishing, nor yet gaily and proudly, as if he were marching at the head of a bridal procession, but slowly, mournfully, monotonously, as though he were having the pipes talk to him.

Mackenzie touched him on the shoulder, and the old man started. “Is it you, Mr. McKenzie?” he said in Gaelic. “It is a great fright you have given me.”

“Come down to the house, John. The lads from Habost and Alister, and some more will be coming; and you will get a ferry good dram, John, to put wind in the pipes.”

“It’s no dram I’m thinking of, Mr. Mackenzie,” said the old man. “And you will have plenty of company without me. But I will come down to the house, Mr. Mackenzie – oh, yes, I will come down to the house – but *in a little while* I will come to the house.”

Mackenzie turned from him with a petulant exclamation, and went along and down the hill rapidly, as he could hear voices in the darkness. He had just got into the house when his visitors arrived. The door of the room was opened, and there appeared some six or eight tall and stalwart men, mostly with profuse brown beards and weather-beaten faces, who advanced into the chamber with some show of shyness. Mackenzie offered them a rough and hearty welcome, and as soon as their eyes had got accustomed to the light bade them help themselves to the whisky on the table. With a certain solemnity each poured out a glass and drank “*Shlainte!*” to his host as if it were some funeral rite. But when he bade them replenish their glasses, and got them seated with their faces to the blaze of the peats, then the flood of Gaelic broke loose. Had the wise little girl from Suainabost warned these big men? There was not a word about Sheila uttered. All their talk was of the reports that had come from Caithness, and of the improvements of the small harbor near the Butt, and of the black sea-horse that had been seen in Lock Suainabhal, and of some more sheep having been found dead on the Pladda Isles, shot by the men of the English smacks. Pipes were lit, the peat stirred up anew, another glass or two of whisky drunk, and then, through the haze of the smoke, the brown faces of the men could be seen in eager controversy, each talking faster than the other, and comparing facts and fancies that had been brooded over through solitary nights of waiting on the sea. Mackenzie did not sit down with them; he did not even join them in their attention to the curious whisky-flasks. He paced up and down the opposite side of the room, occasionally being appealed to with a story or question, and showing by his answers that he was but vaguely hearing the vociferous talk of his companions. At last he said, “Why the teffle does not John the Piper come? Here, you men – you sing a song, quick! None of your funeral songs, but a good brisk one of trinking and fighting.”

But were not nearly all their songs – like those of all dwellers on a rocky and dangerous coast – of a sad and sombre hue, telling of maidens whose lovers were drowned, and of wives bidding farewell to

husbands they were never to see again? Slow and mournful are the songs that the Northern fishermen sing as they set out in the evening, with the creaking of the long oars keeping time to the music, until they get out beyond the shore to hoist the red mainsail and catch the breeze blowing over from the regions of the sunset. Not one of these Habost fishermen could sing a brisk song, but the nearest approach to it was a ballad in praise of a dark-haired girl, which they, owning the *Nighean dubh*, were bound to know. And so one young fellow began to sing, “Mo Nighean dubh d’fhas boidheach dubh, mo Nighean dubhna treig mi,”¹ in a slow and doleful fashion, and the others joined in the chorus with a like solemnity. In order to keep time, four of the men followed the common custom of taking a pocket handkerchief (in this case an immense piece of brilliant red silk, which was evidently the pride of its owner), and holding it by the four corners letting it slowly rise and fall as they sang. The other three men laid hold of a bit of rope, which they used for the same purpose. “Mo Nighean dubh,” unlike most of the Gaelic songs, has but a few verses; and, as soon as they were finished, the young fellow, who seemed pleased with his performance, started another ballad. Perhaps he had forgotten his host’s injunction, perhaps he knew no merrier song, but at any rate he began to sing the “Lament of Monaltrie.” It was one of Sheila’s songs. She had sung it the night before in this very room, and her father had listened to her describing the fate of young Monaltrie as if she had been foretelling her own, and scarcely dared to ask himself if ever again he should hear the voice that he loved so well. He could not listen to the song. He abruptly left the room and went out once more into the cool night-air and the darkness. But even here he was not allowed to forget the sorrow he had been vainly endeavoring to banish, for in the far distance the pipes still played the melancholy wail of Lochaber.

Lochaber no more! Lochaber no more!

– that was the only solace brought him by the winds from the sea; and there were tears running down the hard gray face as he said to himself, in a broken voice, “Sheila, my little girl, why did you go away from Borva?”

¹ “My black-haired girl, my pretty girl, my black-haired girl, don’t leave me.” “Nighean dubh” is pronounced “Nyeen du.”

CHAPTER II. THE FAIR-HAIRED STRANGER

“WHY you must be in love with her yourself!”

“I in love with her? Sheila and I are too old friends for that!”

The speakers were two young men seated in the stern of the steamer *Clansman* as she ploughed her way across the blue and rushing waters of the Minch. One of them was a tall young fellow of three-and-twenty, with fair hair and light blue eyes, whose delicate and mobile features were handsome enough in their way, and gave evidence of a nature at once sensitive, nervous and impulsive. He was clad in light gray from head to heel – a color that suited his fair complexion and yellow hair; and he lounged about the white deck in the glare of the sunlight, steadying himself from time to time as an unusually big wave carried the *Clansman* aloft for a second or two, and then sent her staggering and groaning into a hissing trough of foam. Now and again he would pause in front of his companion, and talk in a rapid, playful, and even eloquent fashion for a minute or two; and then, apparently a trifle annoyed by the slow and patient attention which greeted his oratorical efforts, would start off once more on his unsteady journey up and down the white planks.

The other was a man of thirty-eight, of middle height, sallow complexion and generally insignificant appearance. His hair was becoming prematurely gray. He rarely spoke. He was dressed in a suit of rough blue cloth, and indeed looked somewhat like a pilot who had gone ashore, taken to study and never recovered himself. A stranger would have noticed the tall and fair young man who walked up and down the gleaming deck, evidently enjoying the brisk breeze that blew about his yellow hair, and the sunlight that touched his pale and fine face or sparkled on his teeth when he laughed, but would have paid little attention to the smaller, brown-faced, gray-haired man, who lay back on the bench with his two hands clasped around his knee, and with his eye fixed on the southern heavens, while he murmured to himself the lines of some ridiculous old Devonshire ballad or replied in monosyllables to the rapid and eager talk of his friend.

Both men were good sailors, and they had need to be, for although the sky above them was as blue and clear as the heart of the sapphire, and although the sunlight shone on the decks and the rigging, a strong north-easter had been blowing all the morning, and there was a considerable sea on. The far blue plain was whitened with the tumbling crests of the waves, that shone and sparkled in the sun, and ever and anon a volume of water would strike the *Clansman's* bow, rise high in the air with the shock, and fall in heavy showers over the forward decks. Sometimes, too, a wave caught her broadside, and sent a handful of spray over the two or three passengers who were safe in the stern; but the decks here remained silvery and white, for the sun and wind speedily dried up the traces of the sea-showers.

At length the taller of the young men came and sat down by his companion: “How far to Stornoway yet?”

“An hour.”

“By Jove, what a distance! All day yesterday getting up from Oban to Skye, all last night churning our way up to Loch Gair, all to-day crossing to this outlandish island, that seems as far away as Iceland; – and for what?”

“But don't you remember the moonlight last night as we sailed by the Cuchullins? And the sunrise this morning as we lay in Loch Gair? Were not these worth coming for.”

“But that was not what you came for, my dear friend. No. You came to carry off this wonderful Miss Sheila of yours, and of course you wanted somebody to look on; and here I am, ready to carry the ladder and the dark lantern and the marriage-license. I will saddle your steeds for you and row you over lakes, and generally do anything to help you in so romantic an enterprise.”

“It is very kind of you, Lavender,” said the other with a smile, “but such adventures are not for old fogies like me. They are the exclusive right of young fellows like you, who are tall and well-favored, have plenty of money and good spirits, and have a way with you that all the world admires. Of course the bride will tread a measure with you. Of course all the bridesmaids would like to see you marry her. Of course she will taste the cup you offer her. Then a word in her ear, and away you go as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and as if the bridegroom was a despicable creature merely because God had only given him five feet six inches. But you couldn’t have a Lochinvar five feet six.”

The younger man blushed like a girl and laughed a little, and was evidently greatly pleased. Nay, in the height of his generosity he began to protest. He would not have his friend imagine that women cared only for stature and good looks. There were other qualities. He himself had observed the most singular conquests made by men who were not good-looking, but who had a certain fascination about them. His own experience of women was considerable, and he was quite certain that the best women, now – the sort of women whom a man would respect – the women who had brains —

And so forth and so forth. The other listened quite gravely to these well-meant, kindly, blundering explanations, and only one who watched his face narrowly could have detected in the brown eyes a sort of amused consciousness of the intentions of the amiable and ingenuous youth.

“Do you really mean to tell me, Ingram,” continued Lavender, in his rapid and impetuous way, “do you mean to tell me that you are not in love with this Highland princess? For ages back you have talked of nothing but Sheila. How many an hour have I spent in clubs, up the river, down at the coast, everywhere, listening to your stories of Sheila, and your praises of Sheila, and your descriptions of Sheila! It was always Sheila, and again Sheila, and still again Sheila. But, do you know, either you exaggerated or I failed to understand your descriptions; for the Sheila I came to construct out of your talk, is a most incongruous and incomprehensible creature. First, Sheila knows about stone and lime and building; and then I suppose her to be a practical young woman, who is a sort of overseer to her father. But Sheila, again, is romantic and mysterious, and believes in visions and dreams; and then I take her to be an affected school-miss. But then Sheila can throw a fly and play her sixteen-pounder, and Sheila can adventure upon the lochs in an open boat, managing the sail herself; and then I find her to be a tom-boy. But, again, Sheila is shy and rarely speaks, but looks unutterable things with her soft and magnificent eyes; and what does that mean but that she is an ordinary young lady, who has not been in society, and who is a little interesting, if a little stupid, while she is unmarried, and who, after marriage, calmly and complacently sinks into the dull domestic hind, whose only thought is of butchers’ bills and perambulators!”

This was a fairly long speech, but it was no longer than many which Frank Lavender was accustomed to utter when in the vein for talking. His friend and companion did not pay much heed. His hands were still clasped around his knee, his head leaning back, and all the answer he made was to repeat, apparently to himself, these not very pertinent lines:

“In Ockington, in Devonsheer,
My vather he lived vor many a yeer:
And I, his son, with him did dwell,
To tend his sheep: ’twas doleful well.
Diddle-diddle!”

“You know, Ingram, it must be precious hard for man who has to knock about in society, and take his wife with him, to have to explain to everybody that she is in reality a most unusual and gifted young person, and that she must not be expected to talk. It is all very well for him in his own house – that is to say, if he can preserve all the sentiment that made her shyness fine and wonderful before their marriage – but a man owes a little to society, even in choosing a wife.”

Another pause.

“It happened on a zartin day
Four-score o’ the sheep they rinned astray
Says vather to I, ‘Jack, rin arter ’m, du!’
Says I to vather, ‘I’m darned if I du!’
Diddle-diddle!”

“Now you are the sort of a man, I should think, who would never get careless about your wife. You would always believe about her what you believed at first; and I dare say you would live very happily in your own house if she was a decent sort of woman. But you would have to go out into society sometimes; and the very fact that you had not got careless – as many men would, leaving their wives to produce any sort of impression they might – would make you vexed that the world could not, off-hand, value your wife as you fancy she ought to be valued. Don’t you see?”

This was the answer:

“Puvoket much at my rude tongue,
A dish o’ brath at me he vlung,
Which so incensed me to wrath,
That I up an’ knack un instantly to arth,
Diddle-diddle!”

“As for your Princess Sheila, I firmly believe you have some romantic notion of marrying her and taking her up to London with you. If you seriously intend such a thing, I shall not argue with you. I shall praise her by the hour together, for I may have to depend on Mrs. Edward Ingram for my admission to your house. But if you only have the fancy as a fancy, consider what the result would be. You say she has never been to a school; that she has never had the companionship of a girl of her own age; that she has never read a newspaper; that she has never been out of this island; and that almost her sole society has been that of her mother, who educated her and tended her, and left her as ignorant of the real world as if she had lived all her life in a lighthouse. Goodness gracious! what a figure such a girl would cut in South Kensington!”

“My dear fellow,” said Ingram at last, “don’t be absurd. You will soon see what are the relations between Sheila Mackenzie and me, and you will be satisfied. I marry her? Do you think I would take the child to London to show her its extravagance and shallow society, and break her heart with thinking of the sea, and of the rude islanders she knew, and of their hard and bitter struggle for life? No. I should not like to see my wild Highland doe shut up in one of your southern parks, among your tame fallow-deer. She would look at them askance. She would separate herself from them, and by and by she would make one wild effort to escape and kill herself. That is not the fate in store for our good little Sheila; so you need not make yourself unhappy about her or me.

‘Now all ye young men, of every persuasion,
Never quarl wi’ your vather upon any occasion;
For instead of being better, you’ll vind you’ll be wuss,
For he’ll kick you out o’ doors, without a varden in your puss!
Diddle-diddle!’ ”

“Talking of Devonshire, how is that young American lady you met at Torquay in the Spring?”

“There, now, is the sort of woman a man would be safe in marrying!”

“And how?”

“Oh, well, you know,” said Frank Lavender, “I mean the sort of woman who would do you credit – hold her own in society, and that sort of thing. You must meet her some day. I tell you, Ingram, you will be delighted and charmed with her manners, and her grace, and the clever things she says; at least, everybody else is.”

“Ah, well!”

“You don’t seem to care much for brilliant women,” remarked the other, rather disappointed that his companion showed so little interest.

“Oh, yes, I like brilliant women very well. A clever woman is always a pleasanter companion than a clever man. But you were talking of the choice of a wife; and pertness in a girl, although it may be amusing at the time, may become something else by and by. Indeed, I shouldn’t advise a young man to marry an epigrammatist, for you see her shrewdness and smartness are generally the result of experiences in which *he* has had no share.”

“There may be something in that,” said Lavender; “but of course, you know, with a widow it is different; and Mrs. Lorraine never does go in for the *ingenue*.”

The pale blue cloud that had for some time been lying faintly along the horizon now came nearer and more near, until they could pick out something like the configuration of the island, its bays and promontories and mountains. The day seemed to become warmer as they got out of the driving wind of the Channel, and the heavy roll of the sea had so far subsided. Through comparatively calm water the great Clansman drove her away, until, on getting near the land and under shelter of the peninsula of Eye, the voyagers found themselves on a beautiful blue plain, with the spacious harbor of Stornoway opening out before them. There, on the one side, lay a white and cleanly town, with its shops, and quays and shipping. Above the bay in front stood a great gray castle, surrounded by pleasure-grounds and terraces and gardens; while on the southern side the harbor was overlooked by a semi-circle of hills, planted with every variety of tree. The white houses, the blue bay and the large gray building set amid green terraces and overlooked by wooded hills, formed a bright and lively little picture on this fresh and brilliant forenoon; and young Lavender, who had a quick eye for compositions which he was always about to undertake, but which never appeared on canvas, declared enthusiastically that he would spend a day or two in Stornoway on his return from Borva, and take home with him some sketch of the place.

“And is Miss Sheila on the quay, yonder?” he asked.

“Not likely,” said Ingram. “It is a long drive across the island, and I suppose she would remain at home to look after our dinner in the evening.”

“What? The wonderful Princess Sheila look after our dinner! Has she visions among the pots and pans, and does she look unutterable things when she is peeling potatoes?”

Ingram laughed: “There will a pretty alteration in your tune in a couple of days. You are sure to fall in love with her, and sigh desperately for a week or two. You always do when you meet a woman anywhere. But it won’t hurt you much, and she won’t know anything about it.”

“I should rather like to fall in love with her to see how furiously jealous you would become. However, here we are.”

“And there is Mackenzie – the man with the big gray beard and the peaked cap – and he is talking to the chamberlain of the island.”

“What does he get up on his wagonette for, instead of coming on board to meet you?”

“Oh, that is one of his little tricks,” said Ingram, with a good-humored smile. “He means to receive us in state, and impress you, a stranger, with his dignity. The good old fellow has a hundred harmless ways like that, and you must humor him. He has been accustomed to be treated *en roi*, you know.”

“Then the papa of the mysterious princess is not perfect?”

“Perhaps I ought to tell you now that Mackenzie’s oddest notion is that he has a wonderful skill in managing men, and in concealing the manner of his doing it. I tell you this that you mayn’t laugh

and hurt him when he is attempting something that he considers particularly crafty, and that a child could see through.”

“But what is the aim of it all?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“He does not do a little bet occasionally?”

“Oh, dear! no. He is the best and honestest fellow in the world, but it pleases him to fancy that he is profoundly astute, and that other people don’t see the artfulness with which he reaches some little result that is not of the least consequence to anybody.”

“It seems to me,” remarked Mr. Lavender, with a coolness and shrewdness that rather surprised his companion, “that it would not be difficult to get the King of Borva to assume the honors of a papa-in-law.”

The steamer was moored at last; the crowd of fishermen and loungers drew near to meet their friends who had come up from Glasgow – for there are few strangers, as a rule, arriving at Stornoway to whet the curiosity of the islanders – and the tall gillie who had been standing by Mackenzie’s horses came on board to get the luggage of the young men.

“Well, Duncan,” said the elder of them, “and how are you, and how is Mr. Mackenzie, and how is Miss Sheila? You have not brought her with you, I see.”

“But Miss Sheila is ferry well, whatever, Mr. Ingram, and it is a great day, this day, for her, tat you will be coming to the Lewis; and it wass tis morning she wass up at ta break o’ day, and up ta hills ta get some bits o’ green things for ta rooms you will hef, Mr. Ingram. Ay, it iss a great day, tis day, for Miss Sheila.”

“By Jove, they all rave about Sheila up in this quarter!” said Lavender, giving Duncan a fishing-rod and a bag he had brought from the cabin. “I suppose in a week’s time I shall begin to rave about her, too. Look sharp, Ingram, and let us have audience of His Majesty.”

The King of Borva fixed his eye on young Lavender, and scanned him narrowly as he was being introduced. His welcome of Ingram had been most gracious and friendly, but he received his companion with something of a severe politeness. He requested him to take a seat beside him, so that he might see the country as they went across to Borva; and Lavender having done so, Ingram and Duncan got into the body of the wagonette, and the party drove off.

Passing through the clean and bright little town, Mackenzie suddenly pulled up his horses in front of a small shop, in the windows of which some cheap bits of jewelry were visible. The man came out, and Mr. Mackenzie explained with some care and precision that he wanted a silver brooch of a particular sort. While the jeweler had returned to seek the article in question, Frank Lavender was gazing around him in some wonder at the appearance of so much civilization on this remote and rarely visited island. There were no haggard savages, unkempt and scantily clad, coming forth from their dens in the rocks to stare wildly at the strangers. On the contrary, there was a prevailing air of comfort and “bien-ness” about the people and their houses. He saw handsome girls with coal-black hair and fresh complexions, who wore short and thick blue petticoats, with a scarlet tartan shawl wrapped around their bosom and fastened at the waist; stalwart, thick-set men, in loose blue jacket and trowsers and scarlet cap, many of them with bushy red beards; and women of extraordinary breadth of shoulder, who carried enormous loads in a creel strapped on their backs, while they employed their hands in contentedly knitting stockings as they passed along. But what was the purpose of these mighty loads of fish-bones they carried – burdens that would have appalled a railway porter of the South?

“You will see, sir,” observed the King of Borva, in reply to Lavender’s question, “there is not much of the phosphates in the grass of this island; and the cows they are mad to get the fish-bones to lick, and it is many of them you cannot milk unless you put the bones before them.”

“But why do the lazy fellows lounging about there let the women carry those enormous loads?”

Mr. Mackenzie stared: "Lazy fellows! They hef harder work than any who will know of in your country; and besides the fishing, they will do the ploughing and much of the farm work. And iss the women to do none at all? That iss the nonsense that my daughter talks; but she has got it out of books, and what do they know how the poor people hef to live?"

At this moment the jeweler returned with some half dozen brooches displayed on a plate, and shining with all the brilliancy of cairngorm stones, polished silver and variously-colored pebbles.

"Now, John Mackintyre, this is a gentleman from London," said Mackenzie, regarding the jeweler sternly, "and he will know all apout such fine things, and you will not put a big price on them."

It was now Lavender's turn to stare, but he good-naturedly accepted the duties of referee, and eventually a brooch was selected and paid for, the price being six shillings. Then they drove on again.

"Sheila will know nothing of this; it will be a great surprise for her," said Mackenzie, almost to himself, as he opened the white box, and saw the glaring piece of jewelry lying on the white cotton.

"Good Heavens, sir," cried Frank Lavender, "you don't mean to say you bought that brooch for your daughter?"

"And why not?" said the King of Borva, in great surprise.

The young man perceived his mistake, grew considerably confused, and only said: "Well, I should have thought that – that some small piece of gold jewelry, now, would be better suited for a young lady."

Mackenzie smiled shrewdly: "I had something to go on. It was Sheila herself was in Stornoway three weeks ago, and she was wanting to buy a brooch for a young girl who had come down to us from Suainabost, and is very useful in the kitchen, and it wass a brooch, just like this one, she gave to her."

"Yes, to a kitchen-maid," said the young man, meekly.

"But Mairi is Sheila's cousin," said Mackenzie, with continued surprise.

"Lavender does not understand Highland ways yet, Mr. Mackenzie," said Ingram, from behind. "You know we, in the South, have different fashions. Our servants are nearly always strangers to us – not relations and companions."

"Oh, I hef peen in London myself," said Mackenzie, in somewhat of an injured tone; and then he added, with a touch of satisfaction: "and I hef been in Paris, too."

"And Miss Sheila, has she been in London?" asked Lavender, feigning ignorance.

"She has never been out of the Lewis."

"But don't you think the education of a young lady should include some little experience of traveling?"

"Sheila, she will be educated quite enough; and is she going to London or Paris without me?"

"You might take her."

"I have too much to do on the island now, and Sheila has much to do. I do not think she will ever see any of those places, and she will not be much the worse."

Two young men off for their holidays, a brilliant day shining all around them, the sweet air of the sea and the moorland blowing about them – this little party that now drove away from Stornoway ought to have been in the best of spirits. And indeed the young fellow who sat beside Mackenzie was bent on pleasing his host by praising everything he saw. He praised the gallant little horses that whirled them past the plantations and into the open country. He praised the rich black peat that was visible in long lines and heaps, where the townspeople were slowly eating into the moorland. Then all these traces of occupation were left behind, and the travelers were alone in the untenanted heart of the island, where the only sounds audible were the humming of insects in the sunlight and the falling of the streams. Away in the south the mountains were of a silvery and transparent blue. Nearer at hand the rich reds and browns of the moorland softened into a tender and beautiful green on nearing the margins of the lakes; and these stretches of water were now as fair and bright as the sky above them, and were scarcely ruffled by the moorfowl moving out from the green rushes. Still nearer at hand great masses of white rock lay embedded in the soft soil; and what could have harmonized better

with the rough and silver-gray surface than the patches of rose-red bell-heather that grew up in the clefts or hung over their summits. The various and beautiful colors around seemed to tingle with light and warmth as the clear sun shone on them and the keen mountain air blew over them; and the King of Borva was so far thawed by the enthusiasm of his companions that he regarded the fair country with a pleased smile, as if the enchanted land belonged to him, and as if the wonderful colors and the exhilarating air and the sweet perfumes were of his own creation.

Mr. Mackenzie did not know much about tints and hues, but he believed what he heard; and it was perhaps, after all, not very surprising that a gentleman from London, who had skill of pictures and other delicate matters, should find strange marvels in a common stretch of moor, with a few lakes here and there, and some lines of mountains only good for sheilings. It was not for him to check the raptures of his guest. He began to be friendly with the young man, and could not help regarding him as a more cheerful companion than his neighbor Ingram, who would sit by your side for an hour at a time without breaking the monotony of the horses' tramp with a single remark. He had formed a poor opinion of Lavender's physique from the first glimpse he had of his white fingers and girl-like complexion; but surely a man who had such a vast amount of good spirits and such a rapidity of utterance must have something corresponding to these qualities in substantial bone and muscle. There was something pleasing and ingenuous too about this flow of talk. Men who had arrived at years of wisdom, and knew how to study and use their fellows, were not to be led into these betrayals of their secret opinions; but for a young man – what could be more pleasing than to see him lay open his soul to the observant eye of a master of men? Mackenzie began to take a great fancy to young Lavender.

"Why," said Lavender, with a fine color mantling in his cheeks as the wind caught them on a higher portion of the road, "I had heard of Lewis as a most bleak and desolate island, flat moorland and lake, without a hill to be seen. And everywhere I see hills, and yonder are great mountains which I hope to get nearer before we leave."

"We have mountains in this island," remarked Mackenzie slowly as he kept his eye on his companion, "we have mountains in this island sixteen thousand feet high."

Lavender looked sufficiently astonished, and the old man was pleased. He paused for a moment or two and said. "But this iss the way of it: you will see that the middle of the mountains it has all been washed away by the weather, and you will only have the sides now dipping one way and the other at each side o' the island. But it iss a very clever man in Stornoway will tell me that you can make out what wass the height o' the mountain, by watching the dipping of the rocks on each side; and it iss an older country, this island, than any you will know of; and there were the mountains sixteen thousand feet high long before all this country and all Scotland and England wass covered with ice."

The young man was very desirous to show his interest in this matter, but did not know very well how. At last he ventured to ask whether there were any fossils in the blocks of gneiss that were scattered over the moorland.

"Fossils?" said Mackenzie. "Oh, I will not care much about such small things. If you will ask Sheila, she will tell you all about it, and about the small things she finds growing on the hills. That is not of much consequence to me; but I will tell you what is the best thing the island grows; it is good girls and strong men – men that can go to the fishing and come back to plough the fields and cut the peat and build the houses, and leave the women to look after the fields and the gardens when they go back again to the fisheries. But it is the old people – they are ferry cunning, and they will not put their money in the bank at Stornoway, but will hide it away about the house, and then they will come to Sheila and ask for money to put a pane of glass in their house. And she has promised that to every one who will make a window in the wall of their house; and she is very simple with them and does not understand the old people that tell lies. But when I hear of it I say nothing to Sheila – she will know nothing about it – but I have a watch put upon the people; and it was only yesterday I will take back two shillings she gave to an old woman of Borvabost that told many lies. What does a young

thing know of these old people? She will know nothing at all, and it is better for some one else to look after them, but not to speak one word of it to her.”

“It must require great astuteness to manage a primitive people like that,” said young Lavender, with an air of conviction; and the old man eagerly and proudly assented, and went on to tell of the manifold diplomatic arts he used in reigning over his small kingdom, and how his subjects lived in blissful ignorance that this controlling power was being exercised.

They were startled by an exclamation from Ingram, who called to Mackenzie to pull up the horses just as they were passing over a small bridge.

“Look there, Lavender, did you ever see salmon jumping like that? Look at the size of them!”

“Oh, it iss nothing,” said Mackenzie, driving on again. “Where you will see the salmon, it is in the narrows of Loch Roag, where they come into the rivers, and the tide is low. Then you will see them jumping; and if the water wass too low for a long time, they will die in hundreds and hundreds.”

“But what makes them jump before they get into the rivers?”

Old Mackenzie smiled a crafty smile, as if he had found out all the ways and the secrets of the salmon. “They will jump to look about them – that iss all.”

“Do you think a salmon can see where he is going?”

“And maybe you will explain this to me, then,” said the king, with a compassionate air, “how iss it the salmon will try to jump over some stones in the river, and he will see he can’t go over them; but does he fall straight down on the stones and kill himself? Neffer – no, neffer. He will get back to the pool he left by turning in the air; that is what I hef seen hundreds of times myself.”

“Then they must be able to fly as well as see in the air.”

“You may say about it what you will please, but that is what I know – that is what I know ferry well myself.”

“And I should think there were not many people in the country who knew more about salmon than you,” said Frank Lavender. “And I hear, too, that your daughter is a great fisher.”

But this was a blunder. The old man frowned; “Who will tell you such nonsense? Sheila has gone out many times with Duncan, and he will put a rod in her hand; yes, and she will have caught a fish or two, but it iss not a story to tell. My daughter she will have plenty to do about the house without any of such nonsense. You will expect to find us all savages, with such stories of nonsense.”

“I am sure not,” said Lavender, warmly. “I have been very much struck with the civilization of the island, so far as I have seen it; and I can assure you I have always heard of Miss Sheila as a singularly accomplished young lady.”

“Yes,” said Mackenzie, somewhat mollified, “Sheila has been well brought up; she is not a fisherman’s lass, running about wild and catching the salmon. I cannot listen to such nonsense, and it iss Duncan will tell it.”

“I can assure you, no. I have never spoken to Duncan. The fact is, Ingram mentioned that your daughter had caught a salmon or two – as a tribute to her skill, you know.”

“Oh, I know it wass Duncan,” said Mackenzie, with a deeper frown coming over his face. “I will hef some means taken to stop Duncan from talking such nonsense.”

The young man knowing nothing as yet of the childlike obedience paid to the King of Borva by his islanders, thought to himself, “Well, you are a strong and self-willed old gentleman, but if I were you I should not meddle much with that tall keeper with the eagle beak and the gray eyes. I should not like to be a stag, and know that fellow was watching me somewhere with a rifle in his hands.”

At length they came upon the brow of the hill overlooking Gara-na-hina² and the panorama of the western lochs and mountains. Down there on the side of the hill was the small inn, with its little patch of garden; then a few moist meadows leading over to the estuary of the Black river; and beyond that an illimitable prospect of heathy undulations rising into the mighty peaks of Cracabhal,

² Literally, “Gearaidh-na’k-Aimhne,” the cutting of the river.

Mealasabhal and Suainabhal. Then on the right, leading away to the as yet invisible Atlantic, lay the blue plain of Loch Roag, with a margin of yellow seaweed along its shores, where the rocks revealed themselves at low water, and with a multitude of large, variegated and verdant islands which hid from sight the still greater Borva beyond.

They stopped to have a glass of whisky at Gara-na-hina, and Mackenzie got down from the wagonette and went into the inn.

“And this is a Highland loch!” said Lavender, turning to his companion from the South. “It is an enchanted sea; you could fancy yourself in the Pacific, if only there were some palm trees on the shores of the islands. No wonder you took for an Eve any sort of woman you met in such a paradise!”

“You seem to be thinking a good deal about that young lady.”

“Well, who would not wish to make the acquaintance of a pretty girl, especially when you have plenty of time on your hands, and nothing to do but pay her little attentions, you know, and so forth, as being the daughter of your host?”

There was no particular answer to such an incoherent question, but Ingram did not seem so well pleased as he had been with the prospect of introducing his friend to the young Highland girl whose praises he had been reciting for many a day.

However, they drank their whisky, drove on to Callernish, and here paused for a minute or two to show the stranger a series of large so-called Druidical stones which occupy a small station overlooking the loch. Could anything have been more impressive than the sight of these solitary gray pillars placed on this bit of table-land high over the sea, and telling of a race that vanished ages ago, and left the surrounding plains, and hills, and shores a wild and untenanted solitude? But, somehow Lavender did not care to remain among those voiceless monuments of a forgotten past. He said he would come and sketch them some other day. He praised the picture all around, and then came back to the stretch of ruffled blue water lying at the base of the hill. “Where was Mr. Mackenzie’s boat?” he asked.

They left the high plain, with its *Tuirsachan*,³ or Stones of Mourning, and descended to the side of the loch. In a few moments, Duncan, who had been disposing of the horses and the wagonette, overtook them, got ready the boat, and presently they were cutting asunder the bright blue plain of summer waves.

At last they were nearing the King of Borva’s home, and Ingram began to study the appearance of the neighboring shores, as if he would pick out some feature of the island he remembered. The white foam hissed down the side of the open boat. The sun burned hot on the brown sail. Far away over the shining plain the salmon were leaping into the air, catching a quick glint of silver on their scales before they splashed again into the water. Half a dozen sea-pyes, with their beautiful black and white plumage and scarlet beaks and feet, flew screaming out from the rocks and swept in rapid circles above the boat. A long flight of solan geese could just be seen slowly sailing along the westward horizon. As the small craft got out toward the sea the breeze freshened slightly, and she lay over somewhat as the brine-laden winds caught her and tingled on the cheeks of her passengers from the softer South. Finally, as the great channel widened out, and the various smaller islands disappeared behind, Ingram touched his companion on the shoulder, looked over to a long and low line of rock and hill, and said, “Borva!”

And this was Borva! – nothing visible but an indefinite extent of rocky shore, with here and there a bay of white sand, and over that a table-land of green pasture, apparently uninhabited.

“There are not many people on the island,” said Lavender, who seemed rather disappointed with the look of the place.

³ Another name given by the islanders to these stones, is “Fir-bhreige,” false men. Both names, False Men and the Mourners, should be of some interest to antiquarians, for they will suit pretty nearly any theory.

“There are three hundred,” said Mackenzie with the air of one who had experienced the difficulties of ruling over three hundred islanders.

He had scarcely spoken when his attention was called by Duncan to some object that the gillie had been regarding for some minutes back.

“Yes, it is Miss Sheila,” said Duncan.

A sort of flush of expectation passed over Lavender’s face, and he sprang to his feet. Ingram laughed. Did the foolish youth fancy he could see half as far as this gray-eyed, eagle-faced man, who had now sunk into his accustomed seat by the mast? There was nothing visible to ordinary eyes but a speck of a boat, with a single sail up, which was, apparently, in the distance, running in for Borva.

“Ay, ay, ay,” said Mackenzie in a vexed way, “it is Sheila, true enough; and what will she do out in the boat at this time, when she wass to be at home to receive the gentlemen that hef come all the way from London?”

“Well, Mr. Mackenzie,” said Lavender, “I should be sorry to think that our coming had interfered in any way whatever with your daughter’s amusements.”

“Amusements!” said the old man with a look of surprise. “It iss not amusements she will go for; that is no amusements for her. It is for some teffle of a purpose she will go, when it iss the house that is the proper place for her, with friends coming from so great a journey.”

Presently it became clear that a race between the two boats was inevitable, both of them making for the same point. Mackenzie would take no notice of such a thing, but there was a grave smile on Duncan’s face, and something like a look of pride in his keen eyes.

“There iss no one, not one,” he said, almost to himself, “will take her in better than Miss Sheila – not one in ta island. And it wass me tat learnt her every bit o’ ta steering about Borva.”

The strangers could now make out that in the other boat there were two girls – one seated in the stern, the other by the mast. Ingram took out his handkerchief and waved it: a similar token of recognition was floated out from the other vessel. But Mackenzie’s boat presently had the better of the wind, and slowly drew on ahead, until, when her passengers landed on the rude stone quay, they found the other and smaller craft still some little distance off.

Lavender paid little attention to his luggage. He let Duncan do with it what he liked. He was watching the small boat coming in, and getting a little impatient, and perhaps a little nervous, in waiting for a glimpse of the young lady in the stern. He could vaguely make out that she had an abundance of dark hair looped up; that she wore a small straw hat with a short white feather in it; and that, for the rest, she seemed to be habited entirely in some rough and close-fitting costume of dark blue. Or was there a glimmer of a band of rose-red around her neck?

The small boat was cleverly run alongside the jetty: Duncan caught her bow and held her fast, and Miss Sheila, with a heavy string of lythe in her right hand, stepped, laughing and blushing, on to the quay. Ingram was there. She dropped the fish on the stones and took his two hands in hers, and without uttering a word, looked a glad welcome into his face. It was a face capable of saying unwritten things – fine and delicate in form, and yet full of an abundance of health and good spirits that shone in deep gray-blue eyes. Lavender’s first emotion was one of surprise that he should have heard this handsome, well-knit and proud-featured girl called “little Sheila,” and spoken of in a pretty and caressing way. He thought there was something almost majestic in her figure, in the poising of her head and the outline of her face. But presently he began to perceive some singular suggestions of sensitiveness and meekness in the low, sweet brow, in the short and exquisitely curved upper lip, and in the look of the tender blue eyes, which had long, black eyelashes to give them a peculiar and indefinable charm. All this he noticed hastily and timidly as he heard Ingram, who still held the girl’s hands in his, saying, “Well, Sheila, and you haven’t quite forgotten me? And you are grown such a woman now: why, I musn’t call you Sheila any more, I think. But let me introduce you to my friend, who has come all the way from London to see all the wonderful things at Borva.”

If there was any embarrassment or blushing during that simple ceremony it was not on the side of the Highland girl, for she frankly shook hands with him and said, "Are you very well?"

The second impression which Lavender gathered from her was, that nowhere in the world was English pronounced so beautifully as in the Island of Lewis. The gentle intonation with which she spoke was so tender and touching – the slight dwelling on the *e* in "very" and "well" seemed to have such a sound of sincerity about it that he could have fancied he had been a friend of hers for a lifetime. And if she said "ferry" for "very," what then? It was the most beautiful English he had ever heard.

The party now moved off toward the shore, above the long white curve of which Mackenzie's house was visible. The old man himself led the way, and had, by his silence, apparently not quite forgiven his daughter for having been absent from home when his guests arrived.

"Now, Sheila," said Ingram, "tell me all about yourself; what have you been doing?"

"This morning?" said the girl, walking beside him, with her hand laid on his arm, and with the happiest look on her face.

"This morning, to begin with. Did you catch those fish yourself?"

"Oh, no, there was no time for that. And it was Mairi and I saw a boat coming in, and it was going to Mevaig, but we overtook it, and got some of the fish, and we thought we should be back before you came. However, it is no matter since you are here. And you have been very well! And did you see any differences in Stornoway when you came over?"

Lavender began to think that Styornoway sounded ever so much more pleasant than mere Stornoway.

"We had not a minute to wait in Stornoway. But tell me, Sheila, all about Borva and yourself; that is better than Stornoway. How are your schools getting on? And have you bribed or frightened all the children into giving up Gaelic yet? How is John the Piper? and does the Free Church minister still complain of him? And have you caught any more wild ducks and tamed them? And are there any gray geese up at Lochan-Eilean?"

"Oh, that is too many at once," said Sheila, laughing. "But I am afraid your friend will find Borva very lonely and dull. There is not much there at all, for all the lads are away at the Caithness fishing. And you should have shown him all about Stornoway, and taken him up to the castle and the beautiful gardens."

"He has seen all sorts of castles, Sheila, and all sorts of gardens in every part of the world. He has seen everything to be seen in the great cities and countries that are only names to you. He has traveled in France, Italy, Russia, Germany, and seen all the big towns that you hear of in history."

"That is what I should like to do if I were a man," said Sheila; "and many and many a time I wished I had been a man, that I could go to the fishing and work in the fields, and, then, when I had enough money, go away and see other countries and strange people."

"But if you were a man I should not have come all the way from London to see you," said Ingram, patting the hand that lay on his arm.

"But if I were a man," said the girl, quite frankly, "I should go up to London to see you."

Mackenzie smiled grimly, and said, "Sheila, it is nonsense you will talk."

At this moment Sheila turned around and said, "Oh, we have forgotten poor Mairi. Mairi, why did you not leave the fish for Duncan? They are too heavy for you. I will carry them to the house."

But Lavender sprang forward, and insisted on taking possession of the thick cord with its considerable weight of lythe.

"This is my cousin, Mairi," said Sheila; and forthwith the young, fair-faced, timid-eyed girl shook hands with the gentlemen, and said, just as if she had been watching Sheila, "And are you ferry well, sir?"

For the rest of the way up to the house Lavender walked by the side of Sheila; and as the string of lythe had formed the introduction to their talk, it ran pretty much upon natural history. In about five minutes she had told him more about sea-birds and fish than ever he knew in his life; and

she wound up this information by offering to take him out on the following morning, that he might himself catch some lythe.

“But I am a wretchedly bad fisherman, Miss Mackenzie,” he said. “It is some years since I tried to throw a fly.”

“Oh, there is no need for good fishing when you catch lythe,” she said earnestly. “You will see Mr. Ingram catch them. It is only a big white fly you will need, and a long line, and when the fish takes the fly, down he goes – a great depth. Then when you have got him and he is killed, you must cut the sides, as you see that is done, and string him to a rope and trail him behind the boat all the way home. If you do not do that it is no use at all to eat. But if you like the salmon-fishing my papa will teach you that. There is no one,” she added proudly, “can catch salmon like my papa – not even Duncan – and the gentlemen who come in the autumn to Stornoway, they are quite surprised when my papa goes to fish with them.”

“I suppose he is a good shot, too,” said the young man, amused to notice the proud way in which the girl spoke of her father.

“Oh, he can shoot anything. He will shoot a seal if he comes up but for one moment above the water; and all the birds – he will get you all the birds if you will wish to take any away with you. We have no deer on the island – it is too small for that – but in the Lewis and in Harris there are many, many thousands of deer, and my papa has many invitations when the gentlemen come up in the autumn; and if you look in the game-book of the lodges you will see there is not any one who has shot so many deer as my papa – not any one whatever.”

At length they reached the building of dark and rude stone-work, with its red coping, its spacious porch, and its small enclosure of garden in front. Lavender praised the flowers in this enclosure; he guessed they were Sheila’s particular care; but in truth there was nothing rare or delicate among the plants growing in this exposed situation. There were a few clusters of large yellow pansies, a calceolaria or two, plenty of wallflower, some clove-pinks, and an abundance of sweet-william in all manner of colors. But the chief beauty of the small garden was a magnificent tree-fuchsia which grew in front of one of the windows, and was covered with deep rose-red flowers set amid its small and deep-green leaves. For the rest, a bit of honeysuckle was turned up one side of the porch, and at the small wooden gate there were two bushes of sweetbrier that filled the warm air with fragrance.

Just before entering the house the two strangers turned to have a look at the spacious landscape lying all around in the perfect calm of a Summer day. And lo! before them there was but a blinding mass of white that glared upon their eyes, and caused them to see the far sea and the shores and hills as but faint shadows appearing through a silvery haze. A thin fleece of cloud lay across the sun, but the light was nevertheless so intense that the objects near at hand – a disused boat lying bottom upward, an immense anchor of foreign make, and some such things – seemed to be as black as night as they lay on the warm road. But when the eye got beyond the house and the garden, and the rough hillside leading down to Loch Roag, all the world appeared to be a blaze of calm, silent and luminous heat. Suainabhal and its brother mountains were only as clouds in the south. Along the western horizon the portion of the Atlantic that could be seen lay like a silent lake under a white sky. To get any touch of color they had to turn eastward, and there the sunlight faintly fell on the green shores of Borva, on the narrows of Loch Roag, and the loose red sail of a solitary smack that was slowly coming round a headland. They could hear the sound of the long oars. A pale line of shadow lay in the wake of the boat, but otherwise the black hull and the red sail seemed to be coming through a plain of molten silver. When the young men turned to go into the house the hall seemed a cavern of impenetrable darkness, and there was a flush of crimson light dancing before their eyes.

When Ingram had his room pointed out Lavender followed him into it and shut the door.

“By Jove, Ingram,” he said, with a singular light of enthusiasm on his handsome face, “what a beautiful voice that girl has! I have never heard anything so soft and musical in all my life, and then

when she smiles what perfect teeth she has! And then, you know, there is an appearance, a style, a grace about her figure – but, I say, do you seriously mean to tell me you are not in love with her?”

“Of course I am not,” said the other, impatiently, as he was busily engaged with his portmanteau.

“Then let me give you a word of information,” said the young man, with an air of profound shrewdness; “she is in love with you.”

Ingram rose with some little touch of vexation on his face; “Look here, Lavender, I am going to talk to you seriously. I wish you wouldn’t fancy that every one is in that condition of simmering love-making you delight in. You never were in love, I believe – I doubt whether you ever will be – but you are always fancying yourself in love, and writing very pretty verses about it and painting very pretty heads. I like the verses and the paintings well enough, however they are come by; but don’t mislead yourself into believing that you know anything whatever of a real or serious passion by having engaged in all sorts of imaginative and semi-poetical dreams. It is a much more serious thing than that, mind you, when it comes to a man. And, for Heaven’s sake, don’t attribute any of that sort of sentimental make-believe to either Sheila Mackenzie or myself. We are not romantic folks. We have no imaginative gifts whatever, but we are very glad, you know, to be attentive and grateful to those who have. The fact is, I don’t think it quite fair – ”

“Let us suppose I am lectured enough,” said the other, somewhat stiffly. “I suppose I am as good a judge of the character of women as most other men, although I am no great student, and have no hard and dried rules of philosophy at my fingers’ ends. Perhaps, however, one may learn more by mixing with other people and going out into the world, than by sitting in a room with a dozen of books, and persuading one’s self that men and women are to be studied in that fashion.”

“Go away, you stupid boy, and unpack your portmanteau, and don’t quarrel with me,” said Ingram, putting out on the table some things he had brought for Sheila; “and if you are friendly with Sheila and treat her like a human being, instead of trying to put a lot of romance and sentiment about her, she will teach you more than you could learn in a hundred drawing-rooms in a thousand years.”

CHAPTER III. THERE WAS A KING IN THULE

HE never took that advice. He had already transformed Sheila into a heroine during the half hour of their stroll from the beach and around the house. Not that he fell in love with her at first sight, or anything even approaching to that. He merely made her the central figure of a little speculative romance, as he had made many another woman before. Of course, in these little fanciful dramas, written along the sky-line, as it were, of his life, he invariably pictured himself as the fitting companion of the fair creatures he saw there. Who but himself could understand the sentiment of her eyes, and teach her little love-ways, and express unbounded admiration of her? More than one practical young woman, indeed, in certain circles of London society, had been informed by her friends that Mr. Lavender was dreadfully in love with her; and had been much surprised, after this confirmation of her suspicions, that he sought no means of bringing the affair to a reasonable and sensible issue. He did not even amuse himself by flirting with her, as men would willingly do who could not be charged with any serious purpose whatever.

His devotion was more mysterious and remote. A rumor would get about that Mr. Lavender had finished another of those charming heads in pastel, which, at a distance, reminded one of Greuze, and that Lady So-and-so, who had bought it forthwith, had declared that it was the image of this young lady, who was partly puzzled and partly vexed by the incomprehensible conduct of her reputed admirer. It was the fashion, in these social circles, to buy those heads of Lavender when he chose to paint them. He had achieved a great reputation by them. The good people liked to have genius in their own set whom they had discovered, and who was only to be appreciated by persons of exceptional taste and penetration. Lavender, the uninitiated were assured, was a most brilliant and cultivated young man. He had composed some charming songs, he had written, from time to time, some quite delightful little poems, over which fair eyes had grown full and liquid. Who had not heard of the face that he painted for a certain young lady whom every one expected him to marry?

The young man escaped a great deal of the ordinary consequences of this petting, but not all. He was at bottom really true-hearted, frank and generous – generous even to an extreme – but he had a habit of producing striking impressions which dogged and perverted his every action and speech. He disliked losing a few shillings at billiards, but he did not mind losing a few pounds; the latter was good for a story. Had he possessed any money to invest in shares, he would have been irritated by small rises or small falls; but he would have been vain of a big rise, and he would have regarded a big fall with equanimity, as placing him in a dramatic light. The exaggerations produced by this habit of his fostered strange delusions in the minds of people who did not know him very well: and sometimes the practical results, in the way of expected charities or what not, amazed him. He could not understand why people should have made such mistakes, and resented them as an injustice.

And as they sat at dinner on this still, brilliant evening in Summer, it was Sheila's turn to be clothed in the garments of romance. Her father, with his great gray beard and heavy brow, became the King of Thule, living in this solitary house overlooking the sea, and having memories of a dead sweetheart. His daughter, the princess, had the glamor of a thousand legends dwelling in her beautiful eyes; and when she walked by the shores of the Atlantic, that were now getting yellow under the sunset, what strange and unutterable thoughts must appear in the wonder of her face! He remembered no more how he had pulled to pieces Ingram's praises of Sheila. What had become of the "ordinary young lady, who would be a little interesting, if a little stupid, before marriage, and after marriage sink into the dull, domestic hind?" There could be no doubt that Sheila often sat silent for a considerable time, with her eyes fixed on her father's face when he spoke, or turning to look at some other speaker. Had Lavender now been asked if this silence had not a trifle of dullness in it, he would have replied by asking if there were dullness in the stillness and the silence of the sea. He grew to regard her calm

and thoughtful look as a sort of spell; and if you had asked him what Sheila was like, he would have answered by saying that there was moonlight in her face.

The room, too, in which this mystic princess sat, was strange and wonderful. There were no doors visible, for the four walls were throughout covered by paper of foreign manufacture, representing spacious Tyrolese landscapes and incidents of the chase. When Lavender had first entered this chamber his eye had been shocked by these coarse and prominent pictures – by the green rivers, the blue lakes and the snow-peaks that rose above certain ruddy chalets. Here a chamois was stumbling down a ravine, and there an operatic peasant some eight or ten inches in actual length, was pointing a gun. The large figures, the coarse colors, the impossible scenes – all this looked, at first sight, to be in the worst possible taste, and Lavender was convinced that Sheila had nothing to do with the introduction of this abominable decoration. But somehow, when he turned to the line of ocean that was visible from the window, to the lonely shores of the island and the monotony of colors showing in the still picture without, he began to fancy that there might be a craving up in these latitudes for some presentation, however rude and glaring, of the richer and more variegated life of the South. The figures and mountains on the walls became less prominent. He saw no incongruity in a whole chalet giving way and allowing Duncan, who waited at table, to bring from this aperture to the kitchen a steaming dish of salmon, while he spoke some words in Gaelic to the servants at the other end of the tube. He even forgot to be surprised at the appearance of little Mairi, with whom he had shaken hands a little while before, coming round the table with potatoes. He did not, as a rule, shake hands with servant-maids, but was not this fair-haired, wistful-eyed girl some relative, friend or companion of Sheila's, and had he not already begun to lose all perception of the incongruous or the absurd in the strange pervading charm with which Sheila's presence filled the place?

He suddenly found Mackenzie's deep-set eyes fixed upon him, and became aware that the old man had been mysteriously announcing to Ingram that there were more political movements abroad than people fancied. Sheila sat still and listened to her father as he expounded these things, and showed that, although at a distance, he could perceive the signs of the times. Was it not incumbent, moreover, on a man who had to look after a number of poor people and simple folks, that he should be on the alert?

"It iss not bekass you will live in London you will know everything," said the King of Borva, with a certain significance in his tone. "There iss many things a man does not see at his feet that another man will see who is a good way off. The International, now – "

He glanced furtively at Lavender.

"– I hef been told there will be agents going out every day to all parts of this country and other countries, and they will hef plenty of money to live like gentlemen, and get among the poor people, and fill their minds with foolish nonsense about a revolution. Oh yes, I hear about it all, and there iss many members of Parliament in it; and it is every day they will get farther and farther, all working hard, though no one sees them who does not understand to be on the watch."

Here again the young man received a quiet, scrutinizing glance; and it began to dawn upon him, to his infinite astonishment, that Mackenzie half suspected him of being an emissary of the International. In the case of any other man he would have laughed and paid no heed, but how could he permit Sheila's father to regard him with any such suspicion?

"Don't you think, sir," he said boldly, "that those Internationalists are a lot of incorrigible idiots?"

As if a shrewd observer of men and motives were to be deceived by such a protest! Mackenzie regarded him with increased suspicion, although he endeavored to conceal the fact that he was watching the young man from time to time. Lavender saw all the favor he had won during the day disappearing, and moodily wondered when he should have a chance of explanation.

After dinner they went outside and sat down on a bench in the garden, and the men lit their cigars. It was a cool and pleasant evening. The sun had gone down in the red fire behind the Atlantic,

and there was still left a rich glow of crimson in the West, while overhead, in the pale yellow of the sky, some filmy clouds of rose-color lay motionless. How calm was the sea out there, and the whiter stretch of water coming into Loch Roag! The cool air of the twilight was scented with sweetbrier. The wash of the ripples along the coast could be heard in the stillness. It was a time for lovers to sit by the sea, careless of the future or the past.

But why would this old man keep prating of his political prophecies? Lavender asked of himself. Sheila had spoken scarcely a word all the evening; and of what interest could it be to her to listen to theories of revolution and the dangers besetting our hot-headed youth? She merely stood by the side of her father, with her hand on his shoulder. He noticed, however, that she paid particular attention whenever Ingram spoke; and he wondered whether she perceived that Ingram was partly humoring the old man, at the same time that he was pleasing himself with a series of monologues, interrupted only by his cigar.

"That is true enough, Mr. Mackenzie," Ingram would say, laying back with his two hands clasped around his knee, as usual; "you've got to be careful of the opinions that are spread abroad, even in Borva, where not much danger is to be expected. But I don't suppose our young men are more destructive in their notions than young men always have been. You know every fellow starts in life by knocking down all the beliefs he finds before him, and then spends the rest of his life in setting them up again. It is only after some years he gets to know that all the wisdom of the world lies in the old commonplaces he once despised. He finds that the old familiar ways are the best, and he sinks into being a commonplace person, with much satisfaction to himself. My friend Lavender, now, is continually charging me with being commonplace. I admit the charge. I have drifted back into all the old ways and beliefs – about religion and marriage, and patriotism, and what not – that ten years ago I should have treated with ridicule."

"Suppose the process continues?" suggested Lavender, with some evidence of pique.

"Suppose it does," continues Ingram carelessly. "Ten years hence I may be proud to become a vestryman, and have the most anxious care about the administration of the rates. I shall be looking after the drainage of houses and the treatment of paupers, and the management of Sunday-schools – but all this is an invasion of your province, Sheila," he suddenly added, looking up to her.

The girl laughed and said, "Then I have been commonplace from the beginning?"

Ingram was about to make all manner of protests and apologies, when Mackenzie said, "Sheila, it wass time you go in-doors, if you have nothing about your head. Go in and sing a song to us, and we will listen to you; and not a sad song, but a good merry song. These teffles of the fishermen, it iss always drownings they will sing about from the morning till the night."

Was Sheila about to sing in this clear, strange twilight, while they sat there and watched the yellow moon come up behind the Southern hills? Lavender had heard so much of her singing of these fishermen's ballads that he could think of nothing more to add to the enchantment of this wonderful night. But he was disappointed. The girl put her hand on her father's head, and reminded him that she had had her big greyhound, Bras, imprisoned all the afternoon, that she had to go down to Borvapist, with a message for some people who were leaving by the boat in the morning, and would the gentleman therefore excuse her not singing to them for this one evening?

"But you cannot go away down to Borvapist by yourself, Sheila," said Ingram. "It will be dark before you return."

"It will not be darker than this all the night through," said the girl.

"But I hope you will let us go with you," said Lavender, rather anxiously; and she assented with a gracious smile, and went to fetch the great deerhound that was her constant companion.

And lo! he found himself walking with a princess in the wonderland through that magic twilight that prevails in Northern latitudes. Mackenzie and Ingram had gone on in front. The large deerhound, after regarding him attentively, had gone to his mistress' side, and remained closely there. Lavender could scarcely believe his ears that the girl was talking to him lightly and frankly, as though she had

known him for years, and was telling him of all her troubles with the folks at the Borvapist, and of those poor people whom she was now going to see. No sooner did he understand that they were emigrants, and that they were going to Glasgow before leaving finally for America, than in quite an honest and enthusiastic fashion he began to bewail the sad fate of such poor wretches as have to forsake their native land, and to accuse the aristocracy of the country of every act of selfishness, and to charge the Government of shameful indifference. But Sheila brought him up suddenly. In the gentlest fashion she told him that she knew of these poor people, and how emigration affected them, and so forth, until he was ready to curse the hour in which he had blundered into taking a side on a question about which he cared nothing and knew less.

“But some other time,” continued Sheila, “I will tell you what we do here, and I will show you a great many letters I have from friends of mine who have gone to Greenock and to New York and Canada. Oh, yes, it is very bad for the old people; they never get reconciled to the change – never; but it is very good for the young people, and they are glad of it, and are much better off than they were here. You will see how proud they are of the better clothes they have, and of good food, and of money to put in the bank; and how could they get that in the Highlands, where the land is so poor that a small piece is no use, and they have not money to rent the large sheep farms? It is very bad to have people go away – it is very hard on many of them – but what can they do? The piece of ground that was very good for the one family, that is expected to keep the daughters when they marry, and the sons when they marry, and then there are five or six families to live on it. And hard work – that will not do much with very bad land and the bad weather we have here. The people get downhearted when they have their crops spoiled by the long rain, and they cannot get their peats dried; and very often the fishing turns out bad, and they have no money at all to carry on the farm. But now you will see Borvapist.”

Lavender had to confess that this wonderful princess would persist in talking in a very matter-of-fact way. All the afternoon, while he was weaving a luminous web of imagination around her, she was continually cutting it asunder, and stepping forth as an authority on the growing of some wretched plants or the means by which rain was to be excluded from window-sills. And now, in this strange twilight, when she ought to have been singing of the cruelties of the sea or listening to half-forgotten legends of mermaids, she was engaged with the petty fortunes of men and girls who were pleased to find themselves prospering in the Glasgow police force or educating themselves in a milliner’s shop in Edinburgh. She did not appear conscious that she was a princess. Indeed, she seemed to have no consciousness of herself at all, and was altogether occupied in giving him information about practical subjects in which he professed a profound interest he certainly did not feel.

But even Sheila, when they had reached the loftiest part of their route, and could see beneath them the island and the water surrounding it, was struck by the exceeding beauty of the twilight, and as for her companion, he remembered it many a time thereafter as if it were a dream of the sea. Before them lay the Atlantic – a pale line of blue, still, silent and remote. Overhead, the sky was of a clear, pale gold, with heavy masses of violet cloud stretched across from North to South, and thickening as they got near to the horizon. Down at their feet, near the shore, a dusky line of huts and houses was scarcely visible, and over these lay a pale blue film of peat-smoke that did not move in the still air. Then they saw the bay into which the White Water runs, and they could trace the yellow glimmer of the river stretching into the island through a level valley of bog and morass. Far away, toward the East, lay the bulk of the island – dark green undulations of moorland and pasture; and there, in the darkness, the gable of one white house had caught the clear light of the sky, and was gleaming Westward like a star. But all this was as nothing to the glory that began to shine in the Southeast, where the sky was of a pale violet over the peaks of Melasabhal and Suainabhal. There, into the beautiful dome, rose the golden crescent of the moon, warm in color, as though it still retained the last rays of the sunset. A line of quivering gold fell across Loch Roag, and touched the black hull and spars of the boat in which Sheila had been sailing in the morning. That bay down there, with its white sands and massive rocks, its still expanse of water and its background of mountain peaks

palely colored by the yellow moonlight, seemed really a home for a magic princess who was shut off from all the world. But here, in front of them, was another sort of sea and another sort of life – a small fishing village, hidden under a cloud of pale peat-smoke, and fronting the great waters of the Atlantic itself, which lay under a gloom of violet clouds.

“Now,” said Sheila, with a smile, “we have not always weather as good as this in the island. Will you not sit on the bench over there with Mr. Ingram, and wait until my papa and I come up from the village again?”

“May not I go down with you?”

“No. The dogs would learn you were a stranger, and there would be a great deal of noise, and there will be many of the poor people asleep.”

So Sheila had her way; and she and her father went down the hillside into the gloom of the village, while Lavender went to join his friend Ingram, who was sitting on the wooden bench silently smoking a clay pipe.

“Well, I have never seen the like of this,” said Lavender, in his impetuous way; “it is worth going a thousand miles to see. Such colors and such clearness! and then the splendid outlines of those mountains, and the grand sweep of this loch! This is the sort of thing that drives me to despair, and might make one vow never to touch a brush again. And Sheila says it will be like this all the night through.”

He was unaware that he had spoken of her in a very familiar way, but Ingram noticed it.

“Ingram,” he said, suddenly, “that is the first girl I have ever seen whom I should like to marry.”

“Stuff!”

“But it is true. I have never seen any one like her – so handsome, so gentle, and yet so very frank in setting you right. And then she is so sensible, you know, and not too proud to have much interest in all sorts of common affairs – ”

There was a smile in Ingram’s face, and his companion stopped in some vexation: “You are not a very sympathetic confidant.”

“Because I know the story of old. You have told it me about twenty women; and it is always the same. I tell you, you don’t know anything at all about Sheila Mackenzie yet; perhaps you never may. I suppose you will make a heroine of her, and will fall in love with her for a fortnight, and then go back to London and get cured by listening to the witticisms of Mrs. Lorraine.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to offend you. Some day, no doubt, you will love a woman for what she is, not for what you fancy her to be; but that is a piece of good fortune that seldom occurs to a youth of your age. To marry in a dream, and wake up six months afterwards – that is the fate of ingenuous twenty-three. But don’t you let Mackenzie hear you talk of marrying Sheila, or he’ll have some of his fishermen throw you into Loch Roag.”

“There, now, that *is* one point I can’t understand about her,” said Lavender, eagerly. “How can a girl of her shrewdness and good sense have such a belief in that humbugging old idiot of a father of hers, who fancies me a political emissary, and plays small tricks to look like diplomacy? It is always ‘My papa can do this,’ and ‘My papa can do that,’ and ‘There is no one at all like my papa.’ And she is continually fondling him, and giving little demonstrations of affection, of which he takes no more notice than if he were an Arctic bear.”

Ingram looked up with some surprise in his face. “You don’t mean to say, Lavender,” he said, slowly, “that you are already jealous of the girl’s own father?”

He could not answer, for at this moment Sheila, her father and the big greyhound came up the hill. And again it was Lavender’s good fortune to walk with Sheila across the moorland path they had traversed some little time before. And now the moon was still higher in the heavens, and the yellow lane of light that crossed the violet waters of Loch Roag quivered in a deeper gold. The night air was scented with the Dutch clover growing down by the shore. They could hear the curlew whistling

and the plover calling amid that monotonous splash of the waves that murmured all around the coast. When they returned to the house the darker waters of the Atlantic and the purple clouds of the West were shut out of sight, and before them there was only the liquid plain of Loch Roag, with its pathway of yellow fire, and far away on the other side the shoulders and peaks of the Southern mountains, that had grown gray and clear and sharp in the beautiful twilight. And this was Sheila's home.

PART II

CHAPTER IV. ROMANCE-TIME

EARLY morning at Borva, fresh, luminous and rare; the mountains in the South grown pale and cloud-like under a sapphire sky; the sea ruffled into a darker blue by a light breeze from the west; and the sunlight lying hot on the red gravel and white shells around Mackenzie's house. There is an odor of sweetbrier about, hovering in the warm, still air, except at such times as the breeze freshens a bit, and brings around the shoulder of the hill the cold, strange scent of the rocks and the sea beyond.

And on this fresh and pleasant morning Sheila sat in the big garden-seat in front of the house, talking to the stranger to whom she had been introduced the day before. He was no more a stranger, however, to all appearance, for what could be more frank and friendly than their conversation, or more bright and winning than the smile with which she frequently turned to speak or to listen? Of course, this stranger could not be her friend as Mr. Ingram was – that was impossible. But he talked a great deal more than Mr. Ingram, and was apparently more anxious to please and be pleased; and indeed was altogether very winning and courteous and pleasant in his ways. Beyond this vague impression Sheila ventured upon no further comparison between the two men. If her older friend had been down, she would doubtless have preferred talking to him about all that had happened in the island since his last visit; but here was this newer friend thrown, as it were, upon her hospitality, and eager, with a most respectful and yet simple and friendly interest, to be taught all that Ingram already knew. Was he not, too, in mere appearance like one of the princes she had read of in many an ancient ballad – tall and handsome and yellow-haired, fit to have come sailing over the sea, with a dozen merry comrades, to carry off some sea-king's daughter to be his bride? Sheila began to regret that the young man knew so little about the sea and the Northern islands and those old-time stories; but then he was very anxious to learn.

"You must say *Mach-Klyoda* instead of Macleod," she was saying to him, "if you like *Styornoway* better than Stornoway. It is the Gaelic, that is all."

"Oh, it is ever so much prettier," said young Lavender, with a quite genuine enthusiasm in his face, not altogether begotten of the letter y; "and, indeed, I don't think you can possibly tell how singularly pleasant and quaint it is to an English ear to hear just that little softening of the vowels that the people have here, I suppose you don't notice that they say *gyarden*, for garden –"

"They!" As if he had paid attention to the pronunciation of any one except Sheila herself.

"But not quite so hard as I pronounce it. And so with a great many other words, that are softened and sweetened and made almost poetical in their sound by the least bit of inflection. How surprised and pleased English ladies would be to hear you speak! Oh! I beg your pardon – I did not mean to – I – I beg your pardon –"

Sheila seemed a little astonished by her companion's evident mortification, and said with a smile, "If others speak so in the island, of course I must too; and you say it does not shock you."

His distress at his own rudeness now found an easy vent. He protested that no people could talk English like the people of Lewis. He gave Sheila to understand that the speech of English folks was as the croaking of ravens compared with the sweet tones of the Northern isles; and this drew him on to speak of his friends in the South, and of London, and the chances of Sheila ever going thither.

"It must be so strange never to have seen London," he said. "Don't you ever dream of what it is like? Don't you ever try to think of a great space, nearly as big as this island, all covered over with

large houses, the roads between the houses all made of stone, and great bridges going over the rivers, with railway trains standing? By the way, you have never seen a railway engine?"

He looked at her for a moment in astonishment, as if he had not hitherto realized to himself the absolute ignorance of the remote princess. Sheila, with some little touch of humor appearing in her calm eyes, said: "But I am not quite ignorant of all these things. I have seen pictures of them, and my papa has described them so often that I will feel as if I had seen them all; and I do not think that I should be surprised, except, perhaps, by the noise of the big towns. It was many a time my papa told me of that; but he says I cannot understand it, nor the great distance of land you travel over to get to London. That is what I do not wish to see. I was often thinking of it, and that to pass so many places that you do not know would make you very sad."

"That can be easily avoided," he said, lightly. "When you go to London you must go from Glasgow or Edinburgh in a night train, and fall fast asleep, and in the morning you will find yourself in London, without having seen anything."

"Just as if one had gone across a great distance of sea, and come to another island you will never see before," said Sheila, with the gray-blue eyes under the black eyelashes grown strange and distant.

"But you must not think of it as a melancholy thing," he said, almost anxiously. "You will find yourself among all sorts of gaities and amusements; you will have cheerful people around you, and plenty of things to see; you will drive in beautiful parks, and go to theatres, and meet people in large and brilliant rooms, filled with flowers, and silver, and light. And all through the winter, that must be so cold and dark up here, you will find an abundance of warmth and light, and plenty of flowers, and every sort of pleasant thing. You will hear no more of those songs of drowned people; and you will be afraid no longer of storms, or listen to the waves at night; and by-and-by, when you have got quite accustomed to London, and got a great many friends, you might be disposed to stay there altogether; and you would grow to think of this island as a desolate and melancholy place, and never seek to come back."

The girl rose suddenly and turned to a fuchsia tree, pretending to pick some of its flowers. Tears had sprung to her eyes unbidden, and it was in rather an uncertain voice that she said, still managing to conceal her face: "I like to hear you talk of those places, but – but I will never leave Borva."

What possible interest could he have in combating this decision so anxiously, almost so imploringly? He renewed his complaints against the melancholy of the sea and the dreariness of the Northern winters. He described again and again the brilliant lights and colors of town life in the South. As a mere matter of experience and education she ought to go to London; and had not her papa as good as intimated his intention of taking her?

In the midst of these representations a step was heard in the hall, and then the girl looked around with a bright light on her face.

"Well, Sheila," said Ingram, according to his custom, and both the girl's hands were in his the next minute, "you are down early. What have you been about? Have you been telling Mr. Lavender about the Black Horse of Loch Suainabhal?"

"No; Mr. Lavender has been telling me of London."

"And I have been trying to induce Miss Mackenzie to pay us a visit, so that we may show her the difference between a city and an island. But all to no purpose. Miss Mackenzie seems to like hard winters, and darkness, and cold; and as for that perpetual and melancholy and cruel sea that in the winter time, I should fancy, might drive anybody into a lunatic asylum –"

"Ah, you must not talk badly of the sea," said the girl, with all her courage and brightness returned to her face: "It is our very good friend. It gives us food, and keeps many people alive. It carries the lads away to other places, and brings them back with money in their pockets –"

"And sometimes it smashes a few of them on the rocks, or swallows up a dozen families, and the next morning it is as smooth and treacherous and fair as if nothing had happened."

“But that is not the sea at all,” said Sheila; “that is the storms that will wreck the boats; and how can the sea help that? When the sea is left alone the sea is very good to us.”

Ingram laughed aloud and patted the girl’s head fondly; and Lavender, blushing a little, confessed he was beaten, and that he would never again, in Miss Mackenzie’s presence, say anything against the sea.

The King of Borva now appearing, they all went in to breakfast; and Sheila sat opposite the window, so that all the light coming in from the clear sky and the sea was reflected upon her face, and lit up every varying expression that crossed it or that shone up in the beautiful deeps of her eyes. Lavender, his own face in shadow, could look at her from time to time, himself unseen; and as he sat in almost absolute silence, and noticed how she talked with Ingram, and what deference she paid him, and how anxious she was to please him, he began to wonder if he should ever be admitted to a like friendship with her. It was so strange, too, that this handsome, proud-featured, proud-spirited girl should so devote herself to the amusement of a man like Ingram, and, forgetting all the court that should have been paid to a pretty woman, seem determined to persuade him that he was conferring a favor upon her by every word and look. Of course, Lavender admitted to himself, Ingram was a very good sort of a fellow – a very good sort of a fellow, indeed. If any one was in a scrape about money, Ingram would come to the rescue without a moment’s hesitation, although the salary of a clerk in the Board of Trade might have been made the excuse, by any other man, for a very justifiable refusal. He was very clever, too – had read much, and all that kind of thing. But he was not the sort of man you might expect to get on well with women. Unless with very intimate friends he was a trifle silent and reserved. Often he was inclined to be pragmatic and sententious, and had a habit of saying unpleasantly better things when some careless joke was being made.

He was a little dingy in appearance, and a man who had a somewhat cold manner, who was sallow of face, who was obviously getting gray, and who was generally insignificant in appearance, was not the sort of man, one would think, to fascinate an exceptionally handsome girl, who had brains enough to know the fineness of her own face. But here was this princess paying attentions to him, such as must have driven a more impressionable man out of his senses, while Ingram sat quiet and pleased, sometimes making fun of her, and generally talking to her as if she were a child. Sheila had chatted very pleasantly with him, Lavender, in the morning, but it was evident that her relations with Ingram were of a very different kind, such as he could not well understand. For it was scarcely possible that she could be in love with Ingram, and yet, surely the pleasure that dwelt in her expressive face, when she spoke to him or listened to him, was not the result of a mere friendship.

If Lavender had been told at that moment that these two were lovers, and that they were looking forward to an early marriage, he would have rejoiced with an enthusiasm of joy. He would have honestly and cordially shaken Ingram by the hand; he would have made plans for introducing the young bride to all the people he knew; and he would have gone straight off, on reaching London, to buy Sheila a diamond necklace, even if he had to borrow the money from Ingram himself.

“And have you got rid of the *Airgiod-cearc*,⁴ Sheila?” said Ingram, suddenly breaking in upon these dreams; “or does every owner of hens still pay his annual shilling to the Lord of Lewis?”

“It is not away yet,” said the girl, “but when Sir James comes in the autumn I will go over to Stornoway and ask him to take away the tax; and I know he will do it, for what is the shilling worth to him, when he has spent thousands and thousands of pounds on the Lewis? But it will be very hard on some of the poor people that only keep one or two hens; and I will tell Sir James of all that – ”

“You will do nothing of the kind, Sheila,” said her father, impatiently. “What is the *Airgiod-cearc* to you, that you will go over to Stornoway only to be laughed at and make a fool of yourself?”

“That is nothing – not anything at all,” said the girl, “if Sir James will only take away the tax.”

⁴ Pronounced *Argyud-chark*; literally, “hen money.”

“Why, Sheila, they would treat you as another Lady Godiva,” said Ingram, with a good-humored smile.

“But Miss Mackenzie is quite right,” exclaimed Lavender, with a sudden flush of color leaping into his handsome face, and an honest glow of admiration into his eyes. “I think it is a very noble thing for her to do, and nobody, either in Stornoway or anywhere else, would be such a brute as to laugh at her for trying to help those poor people, who have not too many friends and defenders, God knows.”

Ingram looked surprised. Since when had the young gentleman across the table acquired such a singular interest in the poorer classes, of whose very existence he had for the most part seemed unaware? But the enthusiasm in his face seemed quite honest; there could be no doubt of that. As for Sheila, with a beating heart she ventured to send to her companion a brief and timid glance of gratitude, which the young man observed, and never forgot.

“You will not know what it is all about,” said the King of Borva, with a peevish air, as though it were too bad that a person of his authority should have to descend to details about a petty hen-tax. “It is many and many a tax and a due Sir James will take away from his tenants in the Lewis, and he will spend more money a thousand times than ever he will get back; and it was this *Airgiod-cearc*, it will stand in the place of a great many things taken away, just to remind the folk that they have not their land all in their own right. It is many things you will have to do in managing the poor people, not to let them get too proud, or forgetful of what they owe to you; and now there is no more tacksmen to be the masters of the small crofters, and the crofters they would think they were landlords themselves if there were no dues for them to pay.”

“I have heard of those middlemen; they were dreadful tyrants and thieves, weren’t they?” said Lavender. Ingram kicked his foot under the table. “I mean, that was the popular impression of them – a vulgar error, I presume,” continued the young man, in the coolest manner. “And so you have got rid of them? Well, I dare say many of them were honest men, and suffered very unjustly in common report.”

Mackenzie answered nothing, but his daughter said quickly: “But you know, Mr. Lavender, they have not gone away merely because they cease to have the letting of the land to the crofters. They have still their old holdings, and so have the crofters, in most cases. Every one now holds direct from the proprietor, that is all.”

“So that there is no difference between the former tacksmen and his serf, except the relative size of their farms?”

“Well, the crofters have no leases, but the tacksmen have,” said the girl, somewhat timidly; and then she added: “But you have not decided yet, Mr. Ingram, what you will do to-day. It is too clear for the salmon fishing. Will you go over to Meavig and show Mr. Lavender the Bay of Uig and the seven hunters?”

“Surely we must show him Borvapest first, Sheila,” said Ingram. “He saw nothing of it last night in the dark, and I think if you offered to take Mr. Lavender around in your boat, and show him what a clever sailor you are, he would prefer that to walking over the hill.”

“I can take you all around in the boat, certainly,” said the girl, with a quick blush of pleasure; and forthwith a message was sent to Duncan that cushions should be taken down to the Maighdean-mhara, the little vessel of which Sheila was both skipper and pilot.

How beautiful was the fair sea-picture that lay around them as the Maighdean-mhara stood out to the mouth of Loch Roag on this bright Summer morning! Sheila sat in the stern of the small boat, her hand on the tiller. Lufrath lay at her feet, his nose between the long and shaggy paws. Duncan, grave and watchful as to the wind and the points of the coast, sat amidships, with the sheets of the mainsail held fast, and superintended the seamanship of his young mistress with a respectful but most evident pride. And as Ingram had gone off with Mackenzie to walk over the White Water before going down to Borvapest, Frank Lavender was Sheila’s sole companion out in this wonderland of rock and sea and blue sky.

He did not talk much to her, and she was so well occupied with the boat that he could regard with impunity the shifting lights and graces of her face and all the wonder and winning depths of her eyes. The sea was blue around them; the sky overhead had not a speck of cloud in it; the white sand-bays, the green stretches of pasture and the far and spectral mountains trembled in a haze of sunlight. Then there was all the delight of the fresh and cool wind, the hissing of the water along the boat, and the joyous rapidity with which the small vessel, lying over a little, ran through the crisply curling waters, and brought into view the newer wonders of the opening sea.

Was it not all a dream, that he should be sitting by the side of this sea-princess, who was attended only by her deerhound and the tall keeper? And if a dream, why should it not go on forever? To live forever in this magic land – to have the princess herself carry him in this little boat into the quiet bays of the islands, or out at night, in the moonlight, on the open sea – to forget forever the godless South and its social phantasmagoria, and live in this beautiful and distant solitude, with the solemn secrets of the hills and the moving deep forever present to the imagination, might not that be a nobler life? And some day or other he would take this island-princess up to London, and he would bid the women that he knew – the scheming mothers and the doll-like daughters – stand aside from before this perfect work of God. She would carry with her the mystery of the sea in the depths of her eyes, and the music of the far hills would be heard in her voice, and all the sweetness and purity and brightness of the clear Summer skies would be mirrored in her innocent soul. She would appear in London as some wild-plumaged bird hailing from distant climes, and before she had lived there long enough to grow sad, and have the weight of the city cloud the brightness of her eyes, she would be spirited away again into this strange sea-kingdom, where there seemed to be perpetual sunshine and the light music of the waves.

Poor Sheila! She little knew what was expected of her, or the sort of drama into which she was being thrown as a central figure. She little knew that she, a simple Highland girl, was being transformed into a wonderful creature of romance, who was to put to shame the gentle dames and maidens of London society, and do many other extraordinary things. But what would have appeared the most extraordinary of all these speculations, if she had only known of them, was the assumption that she would marry Frank Lavender. *That* the young man had quite naturally taken for granted; but, perhaps, only as a basis for his imaginative scenes. In order to do these fine things she would have to be married to somebody, and why not to himself? Think of the pride he would have in leading this beautiful girl, with her quaint manners and fashion of speech, into a London drawing-room! Would not every one wish to know her? Would not everyone listen to her singing of those Gaelic songs? for, of course, she must sing well. Would not all his artist friends be anxious to paint her? and she would go to the Academy to convince the loungers there how utterly the canvas had failed to catch the light and dignity and sweetness of her face.

When Sheila spoke he started.

“Did you not see it?”

“What?”

“The seal; it rose for a moment just over there,” said the girl, with a great interest visible in her eyes.

The beautiful dreams he had been dreaming were considerably shattered by this interruption. How could a fairy princess be so interested in some common animal showing its head out of the sea? It also occurred to him, just at this moment, that if Sheila and Mairi went out in this boat by themselves, they must be in the habit of hoisting up the mainsail; and was such rude and coarse work befitting the character of a princess?

“He looks very like a black man in the water, when his head comes up,” said Sheila – “when the water is smooth, so that you will see him look at you. But I have not told you yet about the Black Horse that Alister-nan-Each saw at Loch Suainabhal one night. Loch Suainabhal, that is inland and fresh water – so it was not a seal; but Alister was going along the shore, and he saw it lying up by

the road, and he looked at it for a long time. It was quite black, and he thought it was a boat; but when he came near, he saw it begin to move, and then it went down across the shore, and splashed into the loch. And it had a head bigger than a horse, and quite black, and it made a noise as it went down the shore to the loch.”

“Don’t you think Alister must have been taking a little whisky, Miss Mackenzie?”

“No, not that, for he came to me just after he will see the beast.”

“And do you really believe he saw such an animal?” said Lavender, with a smile.

“I do not know,” said the girl, gravely. “Perhaps it was only a fright, and he imagined he saw it; but I do not know it is impossible there can be such an animal at Loch Suainabhal. But that is nothing; it is of no consequence. But I have seen stranger things than the Black Horse, that many people will not believe.”

“May I ask what they are?” he said, gently.

“Some other time, perhaps, I will tell you; but there is much explanation about it, and, you see, we are going in to Borvapist.”

Was this, then, the capital of the small empire over which the princess ruled? He saw before him but a long row of small huts or hovels, resembling beehives, which stood above the curve of a white bay, and at one portion of the bay was a small creek, near which a number of large boats, bottom upward, lay on the beach. What odd little dwellings those were! The walls, a few feet high, were built of rude blocks of stone or slices of turf, and from those low supports rose a rounded roof of straw, which was thatched over by a further layer of turf. There were few windows, and no chimneys at all – not even a hole in the roof. And what was meant by the two men, who, standing on one of the turf walls, were busily engaged in digging into the rich brown and black thatch and heaving it into a cart? Sheila had to explain to him that while she was doing everything in her power to get the people to suffer the introduction of windows, it was hopeless to think of chimneys; for by carefully guarding against the egress of the peat smoke, it slowly saturated the thatch of the roof, which at certain periods of the year was then taken off to dress the fields, and a new roof of straw put on.

By this time they had run the Maighdean-mhara – the “Sea Maiden” into a creek, and were climbing up the steep beach of shingle that had been worn smooth by the unquiet waters of the Atlantic.

“And will you want to speak to me, Ailasa?” said Sheila, turning to a small girl who had approached her somewhat diffidently.

She was a pretty little thing, with a round, fair face, tanned by the sun, brown hair and soft, dark eyes. She was bare-headed, bare-footed and bare-armed, but she was otherwise smartly dressed, and she held in her hand an enormous flounder, apparently about half as heavy as herself.

“Will ye hef the fesh, Miss Sheila,” said the small Ailasa, holding out the flounder, but looking down all the same.

“Did you catch it yourself, Ailasa?”

“Yes, it wass Donald and me; we wass out in a boat, and Donald had a line.”

“And it is a present for me?” said Sheila, patting the small head and its wild and soft hair. “Thank you, Ailasa. But you must ask Donald to carry it up to the house and give it to Mairi. I cannot take it with me just now, you know.”

There was a small boy cowering behind one of the upturned boats, and by his furtive peepings showing that he was in league with his sister. Ailasa, not thinking that she was discovering his whereabouts, turned quite naturally in that direction, until she was suddenly stopped by Lavender, who called to her and put his hand in his pocket. But he was too late. Sheila had stepped in, and with a quick look, which was all the protest that was needed, shut her hand over the half crown he had in his fingers.

“Never mind, Ailasa,” she said. “Go away and get Donald, and bid him carry the fish up to Mairi.”

Lavender put up the half-crown in his pocket in a somewhat dazed fashion; what he chiefly knew was that Sheila had for a moment held his hand in hers, and that her eyes had met his.

Well, that little incident of Ailasa and the flounder was rather pleasant to him. It did not shock the romantic associations he had begun to weave around his fair companion. But when they had gone up to the cottages – Mackenzie and Ingram not yet having arrived – and when Sheila proceeded to tell him about the circumstances of the fishermen's lives, and to explain how such and such things were done in the fields and pickling-houses, and so forth, Lavender was a little disappointed. Sheila took him into some of the cottages, or rather hovels, and he vaguely knew in the darkness that she sat down by the low glow of the peat-fire, and began to ask the women about all sorts of improvements in the walls and windows and gardens, and what not. Surely it was not for a princess to go advising people about particular sorts of soap, or offering to pay for a pane of glass if the husband of the woman would make the necessary aperture in the stone-wall. The picture of Sheila appearing as a sea-princess in a London drawing-room was all very beautiful in its way, but here she was discussing as to the quality given to broth by the addition of a certain vegetable which she offered to send down from her own garden, if the cottager in question would try to grow it.

"I wonder, Miss Mackenzie," he said, at length, when they got outside, his eyes dazed with the light and smarting with the peat-smoke, "I wonder you can trouble yourself with such little matters, that those people should find out for themselves."

The girl looked up with some surprise: "That is the work I have to do. My papa cannot do everything in the island."

"But what is the necessity for your bothering yourself about such things? Surely they ought to be able to look after their own gardens and houses. It is no degradation – certainly not; for anything you interested yourself in would become worthy of attention by the very fact – but, after all, it seems such a pity you should give up your time to these commonplace details."

"But some one must do it," said the girl, quite innocently, "and my papa has no time. And they will be very good in doing what I ask them – everyone in the island."

Was this a willful affectation? he said to himself. Or was she really incapable of understanding that there was anything incongruous in a young lady of her position, education and refinement busying herself with the curing of fish and the cost of lime? He had himself marked the incongruity long ago, when Ingram had been telling him of the remote and beautiful maiden whose only notions of the world had been derived from literature – who was more familiar with the magic land in which Endymion wandered than with any other – and that at the same time she was about as good as her father at planning a wooden bridge over a stream. When Lavender had got outside again – when he found himself walking with her along the white beach in front of the blue Atlantic – she was again the princess of his dreams. He looked at her face, and he saw in her eyes that she must be familiar with all the romantic nooks and glades of English poetry. The plashing of the waves down there and the music of her voice recalled the sad legends of the fishermen he hoped to hear her sing. But ever and anon there occurred a jarring recollection – whether arising from a contradiction between his notion of Sheila and the actual Sheila, or whether from some incongruity in itself, he did not stop to consider. He only knew that a beautiful maiden who had lived by the sea all her life, and who had followed the wanderings of Endymion in the enchanted forest, need not have been so particular about a method of boiling potatoes, or have shown so much interest in a pattern for children's frocks.

Mackenzie and Ingram met them. There was the usual "Well, Sheila?" followed by a thousand questions about the very things she had been inquiring into. That was one of the odd points about Ingram that puzzled and sometimes vexed Lavender; for if you are walking home at night it is inconvenient to be accompanied by a friend who would stop to ask about the circumstances of some old crone hobbling along the pavement, or who could, on his own door-step, stop to have a chat with a garrulous policeman. Ingram was about as odd as Sheila herself in the attention he paid to those wretched cotters and their doings. He could not advise on the important subject of broth, but he

would have tasted it by way of discovery, even if it had been presented to him in a tea-cup. He had already been prowling around the place with Mackenzie. He had inspected the apparatus in the creek for hauling up the boats. He had visited the curing houses. He had examined the heaps of fish drying on the beach. He had drunk whisky with John the Piper and shaken hands with Alister-nan-Each. And now he had come to tell Sheila that the piper was bringing down luncheon from Mackenzie's house, and that after they had eaten and drunk on the white beach they would put out the Maighdean-mhara once more to sea, and sail over to Mevaig, that the stranger might see the wondrous sands of the Bay of Uig.

But it was not in consonance with the dignity of a king that his guests should eat from off the pebbles, like so many fishermen, and when Mairi and another girl brought down the baskets, luncheon was placed in the stern of the small vessel, while Duncan got up the sails and put out from the stone quay. As for John the Piper, was he insulted for having been sent on a menial errand? They had scarcely got away from the shore when the sounds of the pipes were wafted to them from the hillside above, and it was the "Lament of Mackrimmon" that followed them out to sea:

Mackrimmon shall no more return,
Oh never, never more return!

That was the wild and ominous air that was skirling up on the hillside; and Mackenzie's face, as he heard it, grew wroth. "That teffle of a piper, John!" he said, "will be playing *Cha till mi tuiligh?*"

"It is out of mischief, papa," said Sheila – "that is all."

"It will be more than mischief if I burn his pipes and drive him out of Borva. Then there will be no more of mischief."

"It is very bad of John to do that," said Sheila to Lavender, apparently in explanation of her father's anger, "for we have given him shelter here when there will be no more pipes in all the Lewis. It was the Free Church ministers, they put down the pipes, for there was too much wildness at the marriages when the pipes would play."

"And what do the people dance to now?" asked the young gentleman, who seemed to resent this paternal government.

Sheila laughed in an embarrassed way.

"Miss Mackenzie would rather not tell you," said Ingram. "The fact is, the noble mountaineers of these districts have had to fall back on the Jew's harp. The ministers allow the instrument to be used – I suppose because there is a look of piety in the name. But the dancing doesn't get very mad when you have two or three young fellows playing a strathspey on a bit of a trembling wire."

"That teffle of a piper John!" growled Mackenzie, under his breath; and so the Maighdean-mhara lightly sped on her way, opening out the various headlands of the islands, until at last she got into the narrows by Eilean-Aird-Meinish, and ran up the long arm of the sea to Mevaig.

They landed and went up the rocks. They passed two or three small white houses overlooking the still, green waters of the sea, and then, following the line of a river, plunged into the heart of a strange and lonely district, in which there appeared to be no life. The river track took them up a green glen, the sides of which were about as sheer as a railway cutting. There were no trees or bushes about, but the green pasture along the bed of the valley wore its brightest colors in the warm sunlight, and far up on the hillsides the browns and crimsons of the heather and the silver gray of the rocks trembled in the white haze of the heat. Over that again the blue sky, as still and silent as the world below.

They wandered on, content with idleness and a fine day. Mr. Mackenzie was talking with some little loudness, so that Lavender might hear, of Mr. John Stuart Mill, and was anxious to convey to Ted Ingram that a wise man, who is responsible for the well-being of his fellow creatures, will study all sides of all questions, however dangerous. Sheila was doing her best to entertain the stranger, and he, in a dream of his own, was listening to the information she gave him. How much of it did he

carry away? He was told that the gray goose built its nest in the rushes at the edge of lakes; Sheila knew several nests in Borva. Sheila also caught the young of the wild duck when the mother was guiding them down the hill-rivulets to the sea. She had tamed many of them, catching them thus before they could fly. The names of most of the mountains about here ended in *bhal*, which was a Gaelic corruption of the Norse *fiall*, a mountain. There were many Norse names all through the Lewis, but more particularly towards the Butt. The termination *bost*, for example, at the end of many words, meant an inhabited place, but she fancied *bost* was Danish. And did Mr. Lavender know of the legend connected with the air of *Cha till, cha till mi tuille*?

Lavender started as from a trance, with an impression that he had been desperately rude. He was about to say that the gray gosling in the legend could not speak Scandinavian, when he was interrupted by Mr. Mackenzie turning and asking him if he knew from what ports the English smacks hailed that came up hither to the cod and the ling fishing for a couple of months in the autumn. The young man said he did not know. There were many fishermen at Brighton. And when the King of Borva turned to Ingram, to see why he was shouting with laughter, Sheila suddenly announced to the party that before them lay the great Bay of Uig.

It was certainly a strange and impressive scene. They stood on the top of a lofty range of hills, and underneath them lay a vast semicircle, miles in extent, of gleaming white sand, that had in by-gone ages been washed in by the Atlantic. Into this vast plain of silver whiteness the sea, entering by a somewhat narrow portal, stretched in long arms of a pale blue. Elsewhere the great crescent of sand was surrounded by a low line of rocky hill, showing a thousand tints of olive-green and gray and heather purple; and beyond that again rose the giant bulk of Mealasabhal, grown pale in the heat, into the Southern sky. There was not a ship visible along the blue plain of the Atlantic. The only human habitation to be seen in the strange world beneath them was a solitary manse. But away toward the summit of Mealasabhal two specks slowly circled in the air, which Sheila thought were eagles; and far out on the Western sea, lying like dusky whales in the vague blue, were the Plada Islands – the remote and unvisited Seven Hunters – whose only inhabitants are certain flocks of sheep belonging to dwellers on the main land of Lewis.

The travelers sat down on a low rock of gneiss to rest themselves, and then and there did the King of Borva recite his grievances and rage against the English smacks. Was it not enough that they should in passing steal the sheep, but that they should also, in mere wantonness, stalk them as deer, wounding them with rifle bullets, and leaving them to die among the rocks. Sheila said bravely that no one could tell that it was the English fishermen who did that. Why not the crews of merchant vessels, who might be of any nation? It was unfair to charge upon any body of men such a despicable act, when there was no proof of it whatever.

“Why, Sheila,” said Ingram, with some surprise, “you never doubted before that it was the English smacks that killed the sheep.”

Sheila cast down her eyes and said nothing.

Was the sinister prophecy of John the Piper to be fulfilled? Mackenzie was so much engaged in expounding politics to Ingram, and Sheila was so proud to show her companion all the wonders of Uig, that when they returned to Mevaig in the evening the wind had altogether gone down and the sea was as a sea of glass. But if John the Piper had been ready to foretell for Mackenzie the fate of Mackrimmon, he had taken means to defeat destiny by bringing over from Borvapist a large and heavy boat pulled by six rowers. These were not strapping young fellows, clad in the best blue cloth to be got in Stornoway, but elderly men, gray, wrinkled, weather-beaten and hard of face, who sat stolidly in the boat and listened with a sort of bovine gaze to the old hunchback’s wicked stories and jokes. John was in a mischievous mood, but Lavender, in a confidential whisper, informed Sheila, that her father would speedily be avenged on the inconsiderate piper.

“Come, men, sing us a song, quick!” said Mackenzie, as the party took their seats in the stern and the great oars splashed into the sea of gold. “Look sharp, John, and no teffle of a drowning song!”

In a shrill, high, querulous voice the piper, who was himself pulling one of the two stroke oars, began to sing, and then the men behind him gathering courage, joined in an octave lower, their voices being even more uncertain and lugubrious than his own. These poor fishermen had not had the musical education of Clan-Alpine's warriors. The performance was not enlivening, and as the monotonous and melancholy sing-song that kept time to the oars told its story in Gaelic, all that the English strangers could make out was an occasional reference to Jura or Scarba or Isla. It was, indeed, the song of an exile shut up in "sea-worn Mull," who was complaining of the wearisome look of the neighboring islands.

"But why do you sing such Gaelic as that, John?" said young Lavender, confidently. "I should have thought a man in your position – the last of the Hebridean bards – would have known the classical Gaelic. Don't you know the classical Gaelic?"

"There iss only the wan sort of Kâllic, and it is a ferry goot sort of Kâllic," said the piper, with some show of petulance.

"Do you mean to tell me you don't know your own tongue? Do you not know what the greatest of all the bards wrote about your own island? 'O et præsidium et dulce decus meum, *agus*, Tityre tu catulæ recubans sub tegmine *Styornoway*, Arma virumque cano, *Macklyoda et Borvapist* sub tegmine fagi?' "

Not only John the Piper, but all the men behind him, began to look amazed and sorely troubled; and all the more so that Ingram – who had picked up more Gaelic words than his friend – came to his assistance, and began to talk to him in this unknown tongue. They heard references in the conversation to persons and things with which they were familiar in their own language, but still accompanied by much more they could not understand.

The men now began to whisper awe-stricken questions to each other, and at last John the Piper could not restrain his curiosity. "What in the name of Kott is tat sort of Kâllic?" he asked, with some look of fear in his eyes.

"You are not such a student, John," said Lavender, carelessly, "but still a man in your position should know something of your own language. A bard, a poet, and not know the classical form of your own tongue!"

"Is it ta Welsh Kâllic?" cried John, in desperation, for he knew that the men behind him would carry the story of his ignorance all over Borvapist.

"The Welsh Gaelic? No. I see you will have to go to school again."

"There iss no more Kâllic in ta schools," said the piper, eagerly seizing the excuse. "It iss Miss Sheila; she will hef put away all ta Kâllic from ta schools."

"But you were born half a century before Miss Sheila; how is it that you neglected to learn that form of Gaelic that has been sacred to the use of the bards and poets since the time of Ossian?"

There were no more quips or cranks for John the Piper during the rest of the pull home. The wretched man relapsed into a moody silence and worked methodically at his oar, brooding over this mysterious language of which he had not even heard. As for Lavender, he turned to Mackenzie and begged to know what he thought of affairs in France.

And so they sailed back to Borvapist over the smooth water that lay like a lake of gold. Was it not a strange sight to see the Atlantic one vast and smooth yellow plain under the great glow of saffron that spread across the regions of the sunset? It was a world of light, unbroken but by the presence of a heavy coaster that had anchored in the Bay, and that sent a long line of trembling black down on the perfect mirror of the sea. As they got near the shore, the portions that were in shadow showed with a strange distinctness the dark green of the pasture and the sharp outlines of the rocks; and there was a cold scent of sea-weed in the evening air. The six heavy oars plashed into the smooth bay. The big boat was moored to the quay, and its passengers landed once more in Borva. And when they turned, on their way home, to look from the brow of the hill, on which Sheila had placed a garden seat, lo! all the West was on fire, the mountains in the South had grown dark on their Eastern side,

and the plain of the sea was like a lake of blood, with the heavy hull and masts of the coaster grown large and solemn and distant. There was scarcely a ripple around the rocks at their feet to break the stillness of the approaching twilight.

So another day had passed, devoid of adventure or incident. Lavender had not rescued his wonderful princess from an angry sea, nor had he shown prowess in slaying a dozen stags, nor in any way distinguished himself. To all outward appearance the relations of the party were the same at night as they had been in the morning. But the greatest crises of life steal on us imperceptibly, and have sometimes occurred and wound us in their consequences before we know. The memorable things in a man's career are not always marked by some sharp convulsion. The youth does not necessarily marry the girl whom he happens to fish out of a mill-pond; his life may be far more definitely shaped for him at a prosaic dinner-table, where he fancies he is only thinking of the wines. We are indeed but as children seated on the shore, watching the ripples that come on to our feet; and while the ripples unceasingly repeat themselves, and while the hour that passes is but as the hour before it, constellation after constellation has gone by over our heads unheeded, and we wake with a start to find ourselves in a new day, with all our former life cut off from us and become as a dream.

CHAPTER V. SHEILA SINGS

A KNOCKING at Ingram's door.

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Will ye be goin' to ta fishin', Mr. Ingram?"

"Is that you, Duncan? How the devil have you got over from Mevaig at this hour of the morning?"

"Oh, there wass a bit breeze tis morning, and I hef prought over ta Maighdean-mhara. And there iss a very good ripple on ta water, if you will tak ta other gentleman to try for ta salmon."

"All right. Hammer at his door until he gets up. I shall be ready in ten minutes."

About half an hour thereafter the two young men were standing at the front of Mackenzie's house examining the enormous rod that Duncan had placed against the porch. It was still early morning, and there was a cold wind blowing in from the sea, but there was not a speck of cloud in the sky, and the day promised to be hot. The plain of the Atlantic was no longer a sheet of glass; it was rough and gray, and far out an occasional quiver of white showed where a wave was hissing over. There was not much of a sea on, but the heavy wash of the water around the rocks and sandy bays could be distinctly heard in the silence of the morning.

And what was this moving object down there by the shore where the Maighdean-mhara lay at anchor? Both the young men at once recognized the glimmer of the small white feather and the tightly-fitting blue dress of the sea-princess.

"Why, there is Sheila!" cried Ingram. "What in all the world is she about at such an hour?"

At this moment Duncan came out with a book of flies in his hand, and he said in rather a petulant way, "And it iss no wonder Miss Sheila will be out. And it was Miss Sheila herself will tell me to see if you will go to ta White Water and try for a salmon."

"And she is bringing up something from the boat; I must go and carry it for her," said Lavender, making down the path to the shore with the speed of a deer.

When Sheila and he came up the hill, there was a fine color in the girl's face from her morning's exertions, but she was not disposed to go in-doors to rest. On the contrary, she was soon engaged in helping Mairi to bring in some coffee to the parlor, while Duncan cut slices of ham and cold beef big enough to have provisioned a fishing-boat bound for Caithness. Sheila had had her breakfast; so she devoted all her time to waiting upon her guests, until Lavender could scarcely eat through the embarrassment produced by her noble servitude. Ingram was not so sensitive, and made a very good meal indeed.

"Where's your father, Sheila?" said Ingram, when the last of their preparations had been made and they were about to start for the river. "Isn't he up yet?"

"My father?" said the girl, with the least possible elevation of her eyebrows – "he will be down at Borvapist an hour ago. And I hope that John the Piper will not see him this morning. But we must make haste, Mr. Ingram, for the wind will fall when the sun gets stronger, and then your friend will have no more of the fishing."

So they set out, and Ingram put Sheila's hand on his arm, and took her along with him in that fashion, while the tall gillie walked behind with Lavender, who was or was not pleased with the arrangement. The young man, indeed, was a trifle silent, but Duncan was in an amiable and communicative mood, and passed the time in telling him stories of the salmon he had caught, and of the people who had tried to catch them and failed. Sheila and Ingram certainly went a good pace up the hill and around the summit of it, and down again into the valley of the White Water. The light step of the girl seemed to be as full of spring as the heather on which she trod; and as for her feet getting wet, the dew must have soaked them long ago. She was in the brightest of spirits. Lavender

could hear her laughing in a low, pleased fashion, and then presently her head would be turned up toward her companion, and all the light of some humorous anecdote would appear in her face and in her eloquent eyes, and it would be Ingram's turn to break out into one of those short, abrupt laughs that had something sardonic in them.

But hark! From the other side of the valley comes another sound, the faint and distant skirl of the pipes, and yonder is the white-haired hunchback, a mere speck in a waste of brown and green morass. What is he playing to himself now?

"He is a foolish fellow, that John," said the tall keeper, "for if he comes down to Borvapist this morning, it iss Mr. Mackenzie will fling his pipes in ta sea, and he will haf to go away and work in ta steamboat. He iss a very foolish fellow; and it wass him tat wass goin' in ta steamboat before, and he went to a tailor in Styornoway, and he said to him, 'I want a pair o' troosers.' And the tailor said to him, 'What sort o' troosers iss it you will want?' And he said to him, 'I want a pair o' troosers for a steamboat.' A pair o' troosers for a steamboat! – he is a teffle of a foolish fellow. And it wass him that went in ta steamboat with a lot o' freens o' his, that wass a goin' to Skye to a big weddin' there; and it wass a very bad passage, and when tey got into Portree, the captain said to him, 'John, where iss all your freens that tey do not come ashore?' And he said to him, 'I hef peen down below, sir, and four-thirds o' ta whole o' them are a' half-troonded and sick and tead.' Four-thirds o' ta whole o' them! And he iss just the ferry man to laugh at every other pody when it iss a mistake you will make in ta English."

"I suppose," said Lavender, "you found it rather difficult to learn good English?"

"Well, sir, I hefna got ta good English yet. But Miss Sheila she has put away all the Gaelic from the schools, and the young ones they will learn more of ta good English after that."

"I wish I knew as much Gaelic as you know English," said the young man.

"Oh, you will soon learn. It iss ferry easy if you will only stay in ta island."

"It would take me several months to pick it up, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes – nine or six – that will do," said Duncan. "You will begin to learn ta names o' ta Islands and ta places. There now, as far as you can see is ta Seann Bheinn; and it means ta old hill. And there is a rock there; it is Stac-nan-Balg –"

Here Duncan looked rather perplexed.

"Yes," said Lavender; "what does that mean?"

"It means – it means," said Duncan, in still greater perplexity, and getting a little impatient, "it means —*stac*, tat iss a steep rock; Stac-nan-Balg – it means – well, sir, *it is ower deep for ta English*."

The tone of mortification in which Duncan uttered these words warned Lavender that his philological studies might as well cease; and indeed Sheila and Ingram had by this time reached the banks of the White Water, and were waiting Duncan and his majestic rod.

It was much too bright and pleasant a morning for good fishing, but there was a fair ripple on the pools of the stream where ever and anon a salmon fresh run from the sea would leap into the air, showing a gleaming curve of silver to the sunlight. The splash of the big fish seemed an invitation, and Duncan was all anxiety to teach the stranger, who, as he fancied, knew nothing about throwing a fly. Ingram lay down on a rock some little distance back from the banks, and put his hands beneath his head and watched the operations going forward. But was it really Duncan who was to teach the stranger? It was Sheila who picked out flies for him. It was Sheila who held the rod while he put them on the line. It was Sheila who told where the bigger salmon usually lay – under the opposite bank of the broad and almost lake-like pool into which the small but rapid White Water came tumbling and foaming down its narrow channel of rocks and stones.

Then Sheila waited to see her pupil begin. He had evidently a little difficulty about the big double-handed rod, a somewhat more formidable engine of destruction than the supple little thing with which he had whipped the streams of Devonshire and Cornwall.

The first cast sent both flies and a lump of line tumbling on to the pool, and would have driven the boldest of salmon out of its wits. The second pretty nearly took a piece out of Ingram's ear, and made him shift his quarters with rapidity. Duncan gave him up in despair. The third cast dropped both flies with the lightness of a feather in the running waters of the other side of the pool; and the next second there was a slight wave along the surface, a dexterous jerk with the butt, and presently the line was whirled out into the middle of the pool, running rapidly off the reel from the straining rod.

"Plenty o' line, sir, plenty o' line!" shouted Duncan, in a wild fever of anxiety, for the fish had plunged suddenly.

Ingram had come running down to the bank. Sheila was all excitement and interest as she stood and watched every slackening or tightening of the line as the fish went up the pool and down the pool, and crossed the current in his efforts to escape. The only self-possessed person, indeed, was Lavender himself, who presently said, "Miss Mackenzie, won't you take the rod now and have the honor of landing him? I don't think he will show much more fight."

At this moment, however, the line slackened suddenly, and the fish threw himself clean out of the water, turning a complete somersault. It was a dangerous moment, but the captive was well hooked, and in his next plunge Lavender was admonished by Duncan to keep a good strain on him.

"I will take the second one," Sheila promised, "if you like; but you must surely land your first salmon yourself."

I suppose nobody but a fisherman can understand the generosity of the offer made by the young man. To have hooked your first salmon – to have its first wild rushes and plunges safely over – and to offer to another the delight of bringing him victoriously to bank! But Sheila knew. And what could have surpassed the cleverness with which he had hooked the fish, and the coolness and courage he showed throughout the playing of him, except this more than royal offer on the part of the young hero?

The fish was losing strength. All the line had been got in, although the forefinger of the fisherman felt the pulse of his captive, as it were, ready for any expiring plunge. They caught occasional glimpses of a large white body gliding through the ruddy-brown water. Duncan was down on his knees more than once, with the landing-net in his hand, but again and again the big fish would sheer off, with just such indications of power as to make his conqueror cautious. At length he was guided slowly in to the bank. Behind him the landing-net was gently let into the water – then a quick forward movement, and a fourteen pounder was scooped up and flung upon the bank, landing-net and all. "Hurrah!" cried Ingram, and Lavender blushed like a school-girl; and Sheila, quite naturally and without thinking, shook hands with him and said, "I congratulate you;" and there was more congratulation in her glad eyes than in that simple little gesture.

It was a good beginning, and of course the young man was very much pleased to show Sheila that he was no mere lily-fingered idler about town. He buckled to his work in earnest. With a few more casts he soon got into the way of managing the big rod; and every time the flies fell lightly on the other side of the pool, to be dragged with gentle jerks across the foaming current of the stream. Ingram went back to his couch on the rock. He lay and watched the monotonous flinging back of the long rod, the light whistle of the line through the air, and the careful manipulation of the flies through the water. Or was it something else that he was watching – something that awakened in his mind a sudden sense of surprise and fear, and a new and strange consciousness that he had been guiltily remiss?

Sheila was wholly pre-occupied with her companion and his efforts. He had had one or two rises, but had struck either too soon or too late, until at last there was a terrific plunge and rush, and again the line was whirled out. But Duncan did not like the look of it somehow. The fish had been sheering off when it was hooked, and the deep plunge at the outset was ugly.

"Now will you take the rod?" said Lavender to Sheila.

But before she could answer the fish had come rushing up to the surface, and had thrown itself out of the water, so that it fell on the opposite bank. It was a splendid animal, and Duncan, despite

his doubts, called out to Lavender to slacken his hold. There was another spring into the air, the fish fell with a splash into the water, and the line was flying helplessly into the air with the two flies floating about.

“Ay,” said Duncan, with a sigh, “it wass foul-hooked. It wass no chance of catching him whatever.”

Lavender was most successful next time, however, with a pretty little grilse of about half a dozen pounds, that seemed to have in him the spirit and fight of a dozen salmon. How he rushed and struggled, how he plunged and sulked, how he burrowed along the banks, and then ran out to the middle of the pool, and then threw himself into the air, with the line apparently, but not really, doubling up under him. All these things can only be understood by the fisherman who has played in a Highland stream a wild and powerful little grilse fresh in from the salt water. And it was Sheila who held him captive, who humored him when he sulked, and gently guided him away from dangerous places, and kept him well in hand when he tried to cross the current, until at last, all the fierceness gone out of him, he let himself be tenderly inveigled into the side of the pool, where Duncan, by a dexterous movement, surrounded him with network and placed his shining body among the bright green grass.

But Ingram was not so overjoyed this time. He complimented Sheila in a friendly way, but he was rather grave, and obviously did not care for this business of fishing. And so Sheila, fancying that he was rather dull because he was not joining in the sport, proposed that he should walk back to the house with her, leaving Mr. Lavender with Duncan. And Ingram was quite ready to do so.

But Lavender protested that he cared very little for salmon-fishing. He suggested that they should all go back together. The sun was killing the wind, and soon the pools would be as clear as glass. Had they not better try in the afternoon, when, perhaps, the breeze would freshen? And so they walked back to the house.

On the garden-seat a book lay open. It was Mr. Mill’s “Essay on Liberty,” and it had evidently been left there by Mr. Mackenzie, perhaps – who knows? – to hint to his friends from the South that he was familiar with the problems of the age. Lavender winked to Ingram, but somehow his companion seemed in no humor for a joke.

They had luncheon then, and after luncheon Ingram touched Lavender on the shoulder, and said, “I want to have a word with you privately. Let’s walk down to the shore.”

And so they did; and when they had got some little distance from the house, Ingram said: “Look here, Lavender. I mean to be frank with you. I don’t think it fair that you should try to drag Sheila Mackenzie into a flirtation. I knew you would fall in love with her. For a week or two, that does not matter – it harms no one. But I never thought of the chance of her being led into such a thing, for what is a mere passing amusement to you would be a very serious thing to her.”

“Well?”

“Well? Is not that enough? Do you think it fair to take advantage of this girl’s innocence of the world?”

Lavender stopped in the middle of the path, and said, somewhat stiffly, “This may be as well settled at once. You have talked of flirtation and all that sort of thing. You may regard it as you please, but before I leave this island I mean to ask Sheila Mackenzie to be my wife.”

“Why, you are mad!” cried Ingram, amazed to see that the young man was perfectly serious.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

“Do you mean to say,” continued Ingram, “that even supposing Sheila would consent – which is impossible – you would try to take away that girl from her father?”

“Girls must leave their fathers sometime or other,” said Lavender, somewhat sullenly.

“Not unless they are asked.”

“Oh, well, they are sure to be asked, and they are sure to go. If their mothers had not done so before them, where would they be? It’s all very well for you to talk about it, and argue it out as a

theory, but I know what the facts of the case are, and what any man in my position would do; and I know that I am careless of any consequences, so long as I can secure her for my wife.”

“Apparently you are – careless of any consequences to herself or those about her.”

“But what is your objection, Ingram?” said the young man, suddenly abandoning his defiant manner; “why should you object? Do you think I would make a bad husband to the woman I married?”

“I believe nothing of the sort. I believe you would make a very good husband, if you were to marry a woman whom you know something about, and whom you had really learned to love and respect through your knowledge of her. I tell you, you know nothing about Sheila Mackenzie as yet. If you were to marry her to-morrow, you would discover in six months she was a woman wholly different from what you had expected.”

“Very well, then,” said Lavender, with an air of triumph; “you can’t deny this; you think so much of her that the real woman I would discover must be better than the one I imagine; and so you don’t expect I shall be disappointed?”

“If you marry Sheila Mackenzie you will be disappointed – not through her fault, but your own. Why, a more preposterous notion never entered a man’s head! She knows nothing of your friends or your ways of life; you know nothing of hers. She would be miserable in London, even if you could persuade her father to go with her, which is the most unlikely thing in the world. Do give up this foolish idea, like a good fellow, and do it before Sheila is dragged into a flirtation that may have the most serious consequences to her.”

Lavender would not promise, but all that afternoon various resolutions and emotions were struggling within him for mastery, insomuch that Duncan could not understand the blundering way in which he whipped the pools. Mackenzie, Sheila and Ingram had gone off to pay a visit to an old crone who lived in a neighboring island, and in whom Ingram had been much interested a few years before; so that Lavender had an opportunity of practicing the art of salmon-fishing without interruptions. But all the skill he had shown in the morning seemed to have deserted him; and at last he gave the rod to Duncan, and sitting down on a top-coat flung on the wet heather, indolently watched the gillie’s operations.

Should he at once fly from temptation and return to London? Would it not be heroic to leave this old man in possession of his only daughter? Sheila would never know of the sacrifice, but what of that? It might be for her happiness that he should go.

But when a young man is in love, or fancies himself in love, with a young girl, it is hard for him to persuade himself that anybody else can make her as happy as he might. Who could be so tender to her, so watchful over her, as himself? He does not reflect that her parents have had the experience of years in taking care of her, while he would be a mere novice at the business. The pleasure with which he regards the prospect of being constantly with her he transfers to her, and she seems to demand it of him as a duty that he should confer upon her this new happiness.

Lavender met Sheila in the evening, and he was yet undecided. Sometimes he fancied, when their eyes met unexpectedly, that there was something wistful as well as friendly in her look; was she, too, dreaming of the vague possibilities of the future? This was strange, too, that after each of these little chance reveries she seemed to be moved by a resolution to be more than usually affectionate toward her father, and would go around the table and place her hand on his shoulder and talk to him. Perhaps these things were but delusions begotten of his own imaginings, but the possibility of their being real agitated him not a little, and he scarcely dared to think what might follow.

That evening Sheila sang, and all his half-formed resolutions vanished into air. He sat in a corner of the curious, dimly-lit and old-fashioned chamber, and, lying back in the chair, abandoned himself to dreams as Sheila sang the mystic songs of the Northern coast. There was something strangely suggestive of the sea in the room itself, and all her songs were of the sea. It was a smaller room than the large apartment in which they had dined, and it was filled with curiosities from distant shores, and with the strange captures made by the Borva fishermen. Everywhere, too, were the trophies of

Mackenzie's skill with rod and rifle. Deer's horns, seal skins, stuffed birds, salmon in glass cases, masses of coral, enormous shells, and a thousand similar things made the little drawing-room a sort of grotto; but it was a grotto within hearing of the sound of the sea, and there was no musty atmosphere in a room that was open all day to the cold winds of the Atlantic.

With a smoking tumbler of whisky and water before him, the King of Borva sat at the table, poring over a large volume containing plans for bridges. Ingram was seated at the piano in continual consultation with Sheila about her songs. Lavender, in the dusky corner, lay and listened, with all sorts of fancies crowding in upon him as Sheila sang of the sad and wild legends of her home. Was it by chance, then, he asked himself, that these songs seemed so frequently to be the lamentation of a Highland girl for a fair-haired lover beyond the sea? First of all, she sang the "Wail of Dunevegan," and how strangely her voice thrilled with the sadness of the song! —

Morn, oh mantle thy smiles of gladness!
Night, oh come with thy clouds of sadness!
Earth, thy pleasures to me seem madness!
Macleod, my leal love, since thou art gone.
Dunevegan, oh! Dunevegan, oh!
Dunevegan! Dunevegan!

It was as in a dream that he heard Ingram talking in a matter-of-fact way about the airs, and asking the meaning of certain lines of Gaelic to compare them with the stiff and old-fashioned phrases of the translation. Surely this girl must have sat by the shore and waited for her absent lover, or how could she sing with such feeling? —

Say, my love, why didst thou tarry
Far over the deep sea?
Knew'st thou not my heart was weary,
Heard'st thou not how I sighed for thee?
Did no light wind bear my wild despair
Far over the deep sea?

He could imagine that beautiful face grown pale and wild with anguish. And then some day, as she went along the lonely island, with all the light of hope gone out of her eyes, and with no more wistful glances cast across the desolate sea, might not the fair-haired lover come at last, and leap ashore to clasp her in his arms, and hide the wonder-stricken eyes and the glad face in his bosom? But Sheila sang of no such meeting. The girl was always alone, her lover gone away from her across the sea or into the wilds.

Oh long on the mountain he tarries, he tarries:
Why tarries the youth with the bright yellow hair?
Oh long on the mountain he tarries, he tarries:
Why seeks he the hill when his flock is not there?

That was what he heard her sing, until it seemed to him that her singing was a cry to be taken away from these melancholy surroundings of sea and shore, and carried to the secure and comfortable South, to be cherished and tended and loved. Why should this girl be left to live a cruel life up in these wilds, and to go through this world without knowing anything of the happy existence that might have been hers? It was well for harder and stronger natures to withstand the buffetings of wind and rain, and be indifferent to the melancholy influences of the lonely sea and the darkness of the Northern

winters; but for her – for this beautiful, sensitive, tender-hearted girl – surely some other and gentler fate was in store. What he, at least, could do, he would. He would lay his life at her feet; and if she chose to go away from this bleak and cruel home to the sunnier South, would not he devote himself, as never a man had given himself to a woman before, to the constant duty of enriching her life with all the treasures of admiration and respect and love?

It was getting late, and Sheila retired. As she bade “good night” to him, Lavender fancied her manner was a little less frank toward him than usual, and her eyes were cast down. All the light of the room seemed to go with her when she went.

Mackenzie mixed another tumbler of toddy, and began to expound to Ingram his views upon deer-forests and sheep-farms. Ingram lit a cigar, stretched out his legs and proceeded to listen with much complacent attention. As for Lavender, he sat awhile, hearing vaguely the sounds of his companions’ voices, and then, saying he was a trifle tired, he left and went to his own room. The moon was then clearly shining over Suainabhal, and a pathway of glimmering light lay across Loch Roag.

He went to bed, but not to sleep. He had resolved to ask Sheila Mackenzie to be his wife, and a thousand conjectures as to the future were floating about his imagination. In the first place, would she listen to his prayer? She knew nothing of him beyond what she might have heard from Ingram. He had had no opportunity, during their friendly talking, of revealing to her what he thought of herself; but might she not have guessed it? Then her father – what action might not this determined old man take in the matter? Would his love for his daughter prompt him to consider her happiness alone?

All these things, however, were mere preliminaries, and the imagination of the young man soon overleapt them. He began to draw pictures of Sheila as his wife in their London home, among his friends, at Hastings, at Ascot, in Hyde Park. What would people say of the beautiful sea-princess with the proud air, the fearless eye and the gentle and musical voice? Hour after hour he lay and could not sleep; a fever of anticipation, of fear and hope combined, seemed to stir in his blood and throb in his brain. At last, in a paroxysm of unrest, he rose, hastily dressed himself, stole down stairs, and made his way out into the cool air of the night.

It could not be the coming dawn that revealed to him the outlines of the shore and the mountains and the loch? The moon had already sunk in the Southwest; not from her came that strange clearness by which all these objects were defined. Then the young man bethought him of what Sheila had said of the twilight in these latitudes, and, turning to the North, he saw there a pale glow which looked as if it were the last faint traces of some former sunset. All over the rest of the heavens something of the same metallic clearness reigned, so that the stars were pale, and a gray hue lay over the sea, and over the island, the white bays, the black rocks and the valleys, in which lay a scarcely perceptible mist.

He left the house and went vaguely down to the sea. The cold air, scented strongly with the seaweed, blew about him, and was sweet and fresh on the lips and the forehead. How strange was the monotonous sound of the waves, mournful and distant, like the sound in a sea-shell! That alone spoke in the awful stillness of the night, and it seemed to be telling of those things which the silent stars and the silent hills had looked down on for ages and ages. Did Sheila really love this terrible thing, with its strange voice talking in the night, or did she not secretly dread it and shudder at it when she sang of all that old sadness? There was ringing in his ears the “Wail of Dunevegan” as he listened for a while to the melancholy plashing of the waves all around the lonely shores; and there was a cry of “Dunevegan, oh! Dunevegan, oh!” weaving itself curiously with those wild pictures of Sheila in London, which were still floating before his imagination.

He walked away around the coast, seeing almost nothing of the objects around him, but conscious of the solemn majesty of the mountains and the stillness of the throbbing stars. He could have called aloud, “Sheila! Sheila!” but that all the place seemed associated with her presence; and might he not turn suddenly to find her figure standing by him, with her face grown wild and pale as it was in the ballad, and a piteous and awful look in her eyes? He scarcely dared look around, lest there should be a phantom Sheila appealing to him for compassion, and complaining against him with her

speechless eyes for a wrong that he could not understand. He fled from her, but he knew that she was there; and all the love in his heart went out to her as if beseeching her to go away and forsake him, and forgive him the injury of which she seemed to accuse him. What wrong had he done her that he should be haunted by this spectre, that did not threaten, but only looked piteously toward him with eyes full of entreaty and pain?

He left the shore, and blindly made his way up to the pasture-land above, careless whither he went. He knew not how long he had been away from the house, but here was a small fresh-water lake set around about with rushes, and far over there in the East lay a glimmer of the channels between Borva and Lewis. But soon there was another light in the East, high over the low mists that lay along the land. A pale blue-gray arose in the cloudless sky, and the stars went out one by one. The mists were seen to lie in thicker folds along the desolate valleys. Then a faintly yellow-whiteness stole up into the sky, and broadened and widened, and, behold! the little moorland loch caught a reflection of the glare, and there was a streak of crimson here and there on the dark-blue surface of the water. Loch Roag began to brighten. Suainabhal was touched with rose-red on its Eastern slopes. The Atlantic seemed to rise out of its purple sleep with the new light of a new dawn; and then there was a chirruping of birds over the heath, and the first shafts of the sunlight ran along the surface of the sea, and lit up the white wavelets that were breaking on the beach. The new day struck upon him with a strange sense of wonder. Where was he? Whither had gone the wild visions of the night, the feverish dread, the horrible forebodings? The strong mental emotion that had driven him out now produced its natural reaction; he looked about in a dazed fashion at the revelation of light around him, and felt himself trembling with weakness. Slowly, blindly, and hopelessly he set to walk back across the island, with the sunlight of the fresh morning calling into life ten thousand audible things of the moorland around him.

And who was this that stood at the porch of the house in the clear sunshine? Not the pale and ghastly creature who had haunted him during those wild hours, but Sheila herself, singing some snatches of a song, and engaged in watering the two bushes of sweet-brier at the gate. How bright and roseate and happy she looked, with the fine color of her face lit up by the fresh sunlight, and the brisk breeze from the sea stirring now and again the loose masses of her hair! Haggard and faint as he was, he would have startled her if he had gone up to her then. He dared not approach her. He waited until she had gone around to the gable of the house to water the plants there, and then he stole into the house and upstairs, and threw himself upon the bed. And outside he still heard Sheila singing lightly to herself as she went about her ordinary duties, little thinking in how strange and wild a drama her wraith had that night taken part.

PART III

CHAPTER VI. AT BARVAS BRIDGE

VERY soon, indeed, Ingram began to see that his friend had spoken to him quite frankly, and that he was really bent on asking Sheila to become his wife. Ingram contemplated this prospect with some dismay, and with some vague consciousness that he was himself responsible for what he could not help regarding as a disaster. He had half expected that Frank Lavender would, in his ordinary fashion, fall in love with Sheila – for about a fortnight. He had joked him about it, even before they came within sight of Sheila's home.

He had listened with a grim humor to Lavender's outbursts of admiration, and only asked himself how many times he had heard the same phrases before. But now things were looking more serious, for the young man had thrown himself into the prosecution of his new project with all the generous poetic enthusiasm of a highly impulsive nature. Ingram saw that everything a young man could do to win the heart of a young girl Lavender would do; and Nature had dowered him richly with various means of fascination. Most dangerous of all of these was a gift of sincerity that deceived himself. He could assume an opinion or express an emotion at will, with such genuine fervor that he himself forgot how recently he had acquired it, and was able to convince his companion for the moment that it was a revelation of his inmost soul. It was this charm of impetuous sincerity which had fascinated Ingram himself years before, and made him cultivate the acquaintance of a young man whom he at first regarded as a somewhat facile, talkative and histrionic person. Ingram perceived, for example, that young Lavender had so little regard for public affairs that he would have been quite content to see our Indian empire go, for the sake of eliciting a sarcasm from Lord Westbury; but at the same time, if you had appealed to his nobler instincts, and placed before him the condition of a certain populace suffering from starvation, he would have done all in his power to aid them; he would have written letters to the newspapers, would have headed subscriptions, and would have ended by believing that he had been the constant friend of the people of India throughout his life, and was bound to stick to them to the end of it.

As often as not he borrowed his fancies and opinions from Edward Ingram himself, who was amused and gratified at the same time to find his humdrum notions receive a dozen new lights and colors when transferred to the warmer atmosphere of his friend's imagination. Ingram would even consent to receive from his younger companion advice, impetuously urged and richly illustrated, which he had himself offered in similar terms months before. At this very moment he could see that much of Lavender's romantic conceptions of Sheila's character was only an exaggeration of some passing hints he, Ingram, had dropped, as the Clansman was steaming into Stornoway. But then they were ever so much more beautiful. Ingram held to his conviction that he himself was a distinctly commonplace person. He had grown reconciled to the ordinary grooves of life. But young Lavender was not commonplace; he fancied he could see in him an occasional flash of something that looked like genius; and many and many a time, in regarding the brilliant and facile powers, the generous impulses, and the occasional ambitions of his companion, he wondered whether these would ever lead to anything in the way of production, or even of consideration of character, or whether they would merely remain the passing sensations of an indifferent idler. Sometimes, indeed, he devoutly wished that Lavender had been born a stonemason.

But all these pleasant and graceful qualities, which had made the young man an agreeable companion, were a serious danger now; for was it not but too probable that Sheila, accustomed to the

rude and homely ways of the islanders, would be attracted and pleased and fascinated by one who had about him so much of a soft and Southern brightness with which she was wholly unfamiliar? This open-hearted frankness of his placed all his best qualities in the sunshine, as it were: she could not fail to see the singular modesty and courtesy of his bearing towards women, his gentle manners, his light-heartedness, his passionate admiration of the self-sacrifice of others, and his sympathy with their sufferings! Ingram would not have minded much if Lavender alone had been concerned in the dilemma now growing imminent; he would have left him to flounder out as he had got out of previous ones. But he had been surprised and pained, and even frightened, to detect in Sheila's manner some faint indications – so faint that he was doubtful what construction to put on them – of a special interest in the young stranger whom he had brought with him to Borva.

What could he do in the matter supposing his suspicions were correct? Caution Sheila? – it would be an insult. Warn Mackenzie? – the King of Borva would fly into passion with everybody concerned, and bring endless humiliation on his daughter, who had probably never dreamed of regarding Lavender except as a chance acquaintance. Insist upon Lavender going South at once? – that would merely goad the young man into obstinacy. Ingram found himself in a grievous difficulty, afraid to say how much of it was of his own creation. He had no selfish sentiments of his own to consult: if it were to become evident that the happiness of Sheila and of his friend depended on their marrying each other, he was ready to forward such a project with all the influence at his command. But there were a hundred reasons why he should dread such a marriage. He had already mentioned several of them to Lavender in trying to dissuade the young man from his purpose. A few days had passed since then, and it was clear that Lavender had abandoned all notion of fulfilling those resolutions he had vaguely formed. But the more Ingram thought over the matter, and the further he recalled the ancient proverbs and stories about the fate of intermeddlers, the more evident it became to him that he could take no immediate action in the affair. He would trust to the chapter of accidents to save Sheila from what he considered a disastrous fate. Perhaps Lavender would repent. Perhaps Mackenzie, continually on the watch for small secrets, would discover something, and bid his daughter stay in Borva while his guests proceeded on their tour through Lewis. In any case, it was not all certain that Lavender would be successful in his suit. Was the heart of a proud-spirited, intelligent and busily-occupied girl to be won in a matter of three weeks or a month? Lavender would go South, and no more would be heard of it.

This tour around the island of Lewis, however, was not likely to favor much any such easy escape from the difficulty. On a certain morning the larger of Mr. Mackenzie's boats carried the holiday party away from Borva; and, even at this early stage, as they sat at the stern of the heavy craft, Lavender had arrogated to himself the exclusive right of waiting upon Sheila. He had constituted himself her companion in all their excursions about Borva which they had undertaken, and now, on this longer journey, they were to be once more thrown together. It did seem a little hard that Ingram should be relegated to Mackenzie and his theories of government; but did he not profess to prefer that? Like most men, who have got beyond five-and-thirty, he was rather proud of considering himself an observer of life. He stood aside, as a spectator, and let other people, engaged in all manner of eager pursuits, pass before him for review. Toward young folks, indeed, he assumed a good-naturedly paternal air, as if they were but, as shy-faced children, to be humored. Were not their love affairs a pretty spectacle? As for himself, he was far beyond all that. The illusions of love-making, the devotion, and ambition, and dreams of courtship were no longer possible to him, but did they not constitute, on the whole, a beautiful and charming study, that had about it, at times, some little touches of pathos? At odd moments, when he saw Sheila and Lavender walking together in the evening, he was himself half inclined to wish that something might come of the young man's determination. It would be so pleasant to play the part of a friendly counselor, to humor the follies of the young folks, to make jokes at their expense, and then, in the midst of their embarrassment and resentment, to go forward and pet them a little, and assure them of a real and earnest sympathy.

“Your time is to come,” Lavender said to him suddenly after he had been exhibiting some of his paternal forbearance and consideration; “you will get a dreadful twist some day, my boy. You have been doing nothing but dreaming about women, but some day or other you will wake up and find yourself captured and fascinated beyond anything you have ever seen in other people, and then you will discover what a desperately real thing it is.”

Ingram had a misty impression that he had heard something like this before. Had he not given Lavender some warning of the same kind? But he was so much accustomed to hear those vague repetitions of his own remarks, and was, on the whole, so well pleased to think that his commonplace notions should take root and flourish in this goodly soil, that he never thought of asking Lavender to quote his authority for those profound observations on men and things.

“Now, Miss Mackenzie,” said the young man as the big boat was drawing near to Callernish, “what is to be our first sketch in Lewis?”

“The Callernish Stones, of course,” said Mackenzie himself; “it iss more than one hass come to the Lewis to see the Callernish Stones.”

Lavender had promised to the King of Borva a series of water-color drawings of Lewis, and Sheila was to choose the subjects from day to day. Mackenzie was gratified by this proposal, and accepted it with much magnanimity; but Sheila knew that before the offer was made Lavender had come to her and asked her if she cared about sketches, and whether he might be allowed to take a few on this journey and present them to her. She was very grateful, but suggested that it might please her papa if they were given to him. Would she superintend them, then, and choose the topics for illustration? Yes, she would do that; and so the young man was furnished with a roving commission.

He brought her a little sepia sketch of Borvapist, its huts, its bay, and its upturned boats on the beach. Sheila's expressions of praise, the admiration and pleasure that shone in her eyes, would have turned any young man's head. But her papa looked at the picture with a critical eye, and remarked, “Oh, yes, it is ferry good, but is not the color of Loch Roag at all. It is the color of a river where there is a flood of rain. I have neffer at all seen Loch Roag a brown color – neffer at all.”

It was clear then, that the subsequent sketches could not be taken in sepia, and so Lavender proposed to make a series of pencil-drawings, which could be washed in with color afterward. There was one subject, indeed, which since his arrival in Lewis he had tried to fix on paper by every conceivable means in his power, and that was Sheila herself. He had spoiled innumerable sheets of paper in trying to get some likeness of her which would satisfy himself, but all his usual skill seemed somehow to have gone from him. He could not understand it. In ordinary circumstances he could have traced in a dozen lines a portrait that would at least have shown a superficial likeness: he could have multiplied portraits by the dozen of old Mackenzie or Ingram or Duncan, but here he seemed to fail utterly. He invited no criticism, certainly. These efforts were made in his own room, and he asked no one's opinion as to the likeness. He could, indeed, certify to himself that the drawing of the features was correct enough. There was the sweet and placid forehead, with its low masses of dark hair; there the short upper lip, the finely carved mouth, the beautifully-rounded chin and throat; and there the frank, clear, proud eyes, with their long lashes and highly-curved eyebrows. Sometimes, too, a touch of color added warmth to the complexion, put a glimmer of the blue sea beneath the long, black eyelashes, and drew a thread of scarlet around the white neck.

But was this Sheila? Could he take this sheet of paper to his friends in London and say, Here is the magical princess whom I hope to bring to you from the North, with all the glamour of the sea around her? He felt instinctively that there would be an awkward pause. The people would praise the handsome, frank, courageous head, and look upon the bit of red ribbon around the neck as an effective artistic touch. They would hand him back the paper with a compliment, and he would find himself in an agony of unrest because they had misunderstood the portrait, and seen nothing of the wonder that encompassed this Highland girl as if with a garment of mystery and dreams.

So he tore up portrait after portrait – more than one of which would have startled Ingram by its truth – and then, to prove to himself that he was not growing mad, he resolved to try a portrait of some other person. He drew a head of old Mackenzie in chalk, and was amazed at the rapidity and facility with which he executed the task. Then there could be no doubt as to the success of the likeness nor as to the effect of the picture. The King of Borva, with his heavy eyebrows, his aquiline nose, his keen gray eyes and flowing beard, offered a fine subject; and there was something really royal and massive and noble in the head that Lavender, well satisfied with his work, took down stairs one evening. Sheila was alone in the drawing-room, turning over some music.

“Miss Mackenzie,” he said, rather kindly, “would you look at this?”

Sheila turned around, and the sudden light of pleasure that leapt to her face was all the praise and all the assurance he wanted. But he had more than that. The girl was grateful to him beyond all the words she could utter; and when he asked her if she would accept the picture, she thanked him by taking his hand for a moment, and then she left the room to call in Ingram and her father. All the evening there was a singular look of happiness on her face. When she met Lavender’s eyes with hers there was a frank and friendly look of gratitude ready to reward him. When had he earned so much before by a simple sketch? Many and many a portrait, carefully executed and elaborately framed, had he presented to his lady friends in London, to receive from them a pretty note and a few words of thanks when next he called. Here with a rough chalk sketch he had awakened an amount of gratitude that almost surprised him, in the most beautiful and tender soul in this world; and had not this princess among women taken his hand for a moment as a childlike way of expressing her thanks, while her eyes spoke more than her lips? And the more he looked at those eyes, the more he grew to despair of ever being able to put down the magic of them in lines and colors.

At length, Duncan got the boat into the small creek at Callernish, and the party got out on the shore. As they were going up the steep path leading to the plain above, a young girl met them, who looked at them in rather a strange way. She had a fair, pretty, wondering face, with singularly high eyebrows, and clear, light blue eyes.

“How are you, Eily?” said Mackenzie, as he passed on with Ingram.

But Sheila, on making the same inquiry, shook hands with the girl, who smiled in a confidential way, and, coming quite close, nodded and pointed down to the water’s edge.

“Have you seen them to-day, Eily?” said Sheila, still holding the girl by the hands, and looking at the fair, pretty, strange face.

“It wass sa day before yesterday,” she answered, in a whisper, while a pleased smile appeared on her face, “and sey will be here sa night.”

“Good-bye, Eily; take care you don’t stay out at night and catch cold, you know,” said Sheila; and then, with another little nod and a smile, the young girl went down the path.

“It is Eily of-the-Ghosts, as they call her,” said Sheila to Lavender as they went on; “the poor thing fancies she sees little people about the rocks, and watches for them. But she is very good and quiet, and she is not afraid of them, and she does no harm to any one. She does not belong to the Lewis – I think she is from Islay – but she sometimes comes to pay us a visit at Borva, and my papa is very kind to her.”

“Mr. Ingram does not appear to know her; I thought he was acquainted with every one in the island,” said Lavender.

“She was not here when he has been in the Lewis before,” said Sheila; “but Eily does not like to speak to strangers, and I do not think you could get her to speak to you if you tried.”

Lavender had paid but little attention to the “false men” of Callernish when first he saw them, but now he approached the long lines of big stones upon this lonely plateau with a new interest; for Sheila had talked to him about them many a time in Borva, and had asked his opinion about their origin and their age. Was the central circle of stones an altar, with the other series marking the approaches to it? Or, was it the grave of some great chieftain, with the remaining stones indicating the

graves of his relations and friends? Or was it the commemoration of some battle in olden times, or the record of astronomical or geometrical discoveries, or a temple once devoted to serpent-worship, or what? Lavender, who knew absolutely nothing at all about the matter, was probably as well qualified as anybody else to answer these questions, but he forebore. The interest, however, that Sheila showed in such things he very rapidly acquired. When he came to see the rows of stones a second time he was much impressed by their position on this bit of hill overlooking the sea. He sat down on his camp-stool with the determination that, although he could not satisfy Sheila's wistful questions, he would present her with some little sketch of these monuments and their surroundings, which might catch up something of the mysterious loneliness of the scene.

He would not, of course, have the picture as it then presented itself. The sun was glowing on the grass around him, and lighting up the tall, gray pillars of stone with a cheerful radiance. Over there the waters of Loch Roag were bright and blue, and beyond the lake the undulations of moorland were green and beautiful, and the mountains in the South grown pale as silver in the heat. Here was a pretty young lady, in a rough blue traveling dress and a hat and feather, who was engaged in picking up wild flowers from the warm heath. There was a gentleman from the office of the Board of Trade, who was sitting on the grass, nursing his knees and whistling. From time to time the chief figure in the foreground was an elderly gentleman, who evidently expected that he was going to be put into the picture, and who was occasionally dropping a cautious hint that he did not always wear this rough-and-ready sailor's costume. Mackenzie was also most anxious to point out to the artist the names of the hills and districts lying to the south of Loch Roag, apparently with the hope that the sketch would have a certain topographical interest for future visitors.

No; Lavender was content at that moment to take down the outlines of the great stones and the configuration of the lake and hill beyond, but by and by he would give another sort of atmosphere to this wild scene. He would have rain and darkness spread over the island, with the low hills in the South grown desolate and remote, and the waters of the sea covered with gloom. No human figure should be visible on this remote plain, where these strange memorials had stood for centuries exposed to Western gales and the stillness of the Winter nights, and the awful silence of the stars. Would not Sheila, at least, understand the bleakness and desolation of the picture? Of course her father would like to have everything blue and green. He seemed a little disappointed when it was clear that no distant glimpse of Borva could be introduced into the sketch. But Sheila's imagination would be captured by this sombre picture, and perhaps by and by in some other land, amid fairer scenes and in a more generous climate, she might be less inclined to hunger for the dark and melancholy North when she looked on this record of its gloom and sadness.

"Iss he going to put any people in the pictures?" said Mackenzie in a confidential whisper to Ingram.

Ingram got up from the grass, and said with a yawn, "I don't know. If he does, it will be afterward. Suppose we go along to the wagonette and see if Duncan has brought everything up from the boat?"

The old man seemed rather unwilling to be cut out of this particular sketch, but he went, nevertheless; and Sheila, seeing the young man left alone, and thinking that not quite fair, went over to him and asked if she might be permitted to see as much as he had done.

Lavender shut up the book.

"No," he said with a laugh, "you shall see it to-night. I have sufficient memoranda to work something out of by and by. Shall we have another look at the circle up there?"

He folded up and shouldered his camp-stool, and they walked up to the point at which the lines of the "mourners" converged. Perhaps he was moved by a great antiquarian curiosity; at all events, he showed a singular interest in the monuments, and talked to his companion about all the possible theories connected with such stones in a fashion that charmed her greatly. She was easily persuaded that the Callernish "Fir-Bhreige" were the most interesting relics in the world. He had

seen Stonehenge, but Stonehenge was too scattered to be impressive. There was more mystery about the means by which the inhabitants of a small island could have hewn and carved and erected these blocks; there was, moreover, the mystery about the vanished population itself. Yes, he had been to Carnac also. He had driven down from Auray in a lumbering old trap, his coachman being unable to talk French. He had seen the half-cultivated plain on which there were rows and rows of small stones, scarcely to be distinguished from the stone walls of the adjoining farms. What was there impressive about such a sight when you went into a house and paid a franc to be shown the gold ornaments picked up about the place? Here, however, was a perfect series of those strange memorials, with the long lanes leading up to a circle, and the tallest of all the stones placed on the Western side of the circle, perhaps as the headstone of the buried chief. Look at the position, too – the silent hill, the waters of the sea-loch around it, and beyond that the desolation of miles of untenanted moorland. Sheila looked pleased that her companion, after coming so far, should have found something worth looking at in the Lewis.

“Does it not seem strange,” he said suddenly, “to think of young folks of the present day picking up wild flowers from among these old stones?” He was looking at a tiny bouquet which she had gathered.

“Will you take them?” she said, quite simply and naturally, offering him the flowers. “They may remind you some time of Callernish.”

He took the flowers and regarded them for a moment in silence, and then he said gently, “I do not think I shall want these to remind me of Callernish. I shall never forget our being here.”

At this moment, perhaps fortunately, Duncan appeared, and came along toward the young people with a basket in his hand.

“It wass Mr. Mackenzie will ask if ye will tek a glass o’ whisky, sir, and a bit o’ bread and cheese. And he wass sayin’ there was no hurry at all, and he will wait for you for two hours or half an hour whatever.”

“All right, Duncan; go back and tell him I have finished, and we shall be there directly. No, thank you, don’t take out the whisky – unless, Miss Mackenzie,” added the young man with a smile, “Duncan can persuade you.”

Duncan looked with amazement at the man who dared to joke about Miss Sheila taking whisky, and without waiting for any further commands indignantly shut the lid of the basket and walked off.

“I wonder, Miss Mackenzie,” said Lavender, as they went along the path down the hill – “I wonder what you would say if I happened to call you Sheila by mistake?”

“I should be glad if you did that. Every one calls me Sheila,” said the girl quietly enough.

“You would not be vexed?” he said, regarding her with a little surprise.

“No; why should I be vexed?” she answered; and she happened to look up, and he saw what a clear light of sincerity there was shining in her eyes.

“May I then call you Sheila?”

“Yes.”

“But – but – ” he said, with a timidity and embarrassment of which she showed no trace whatever – “but people might think it strange, you know; and yet I should greatly like to call you Sheila; only, not before other people perhaps.”

“But why not?” she said, with her eyebrows just raised a little. “Why should you wish to call me Sheila at one time and not at the other? It is no difference whatever, and every one calls me Sheila.”

Lavender was a little disappointed. He had hoped, when she consented in so friendly a manner to his calling her by any name he chose, that he could have established this little arrangement, which would have had about it something of the nature of a personal confidence. Sheila would evidently have none of that. Was it that she was really so simple and frank in her ways that she did not understand why there should be such a difference, and what it might imply, or was she well aware of everything he had been wishing, and able to assume this air of simplicity and ignorance with a perfect grace?

Ingram, he reflected, would have said at once that to suspect Sheila of such duplicity was to insult her; but then Ingram was perhaps himself a trifle too easily imposed on, and he had notions about women, despite all his philosophical reading and such like, that a little more mingling in society might have caused him to alter. Frank Lavender confessed to himself that Sheila was either a miracle of ingenuousness or a thorough mistress of the art of assuming it. On the one hand, he considered it almost impossible for a woman to be so disingenuous; on the other hand, how could this girl have taught herself, in the solitude of a savage island, a species of histrionicism which women in London circles strove for years to acquire, and rarely acquired in any perfection? At all events, he said to himself, while he reserved his opinion on this point, he was not going to call Sheila, Sheila before folks who would know what that meant. Mr. Mackenzie was evidently a most irascible old gentleman. Goodness only knew what sort of law prevailed in these wild parts; and to be seized at midnight by a couple of brawny fishermen, to be carried down to a projecting ledge of rock! Had not Ingram already hinted that Mackenzie would straightway throw into Loch Roag the man who should offer to carry away Sheila from him?

But how could these doubts of Sheila's sincerity last? He sat opposite her in the wagonette, and the perfect truth of her face, of her frank eyes and of her ready smile met him at every moment, whether he talked to her or to Ingram, or listened to old Mackenzie, who turned from time to time from the driving of the horses to inform the stranger of what he saw around him. It was the most brilliant of mornings. The sun burned on the white road, on the green moorland, on the gray lichened rocks with their crimson patches of heather. As they drove by the curious convolutions of this rugged coast the sea that lay beyond these recurring bays and points was of a windy green, with here and there a streak of white, and the fresh breeze blowing across to them tempered the fierce heat of the sun. How cool, too, were those little fresh-water lakes they passed, the clear blue and white of them stirred into wavelets that moved the reeds and left air-bubbles about the half-submerged stones! Were not those wild geese over there, flapping in the water with their huge wings and taking no notice of the passing strangers? Lavender had never seen this lonely coast in times of gloom, with those little lakes becoming sombre pools, and the outline of the rocks beyond lost in the driving mist of the sea and the rain. It was altogether a bright and beautiful world he had got into, and there was in it but one woman, beautiful beyond his dreams. To doubt her was to doubt all women. When he looked at her he forgot the caution and distrust and sardonic self-complacency his Southern training had given him. He believed, and the world seemed to be filled with a new light.

"That is Loch-na-Muil'ne," Mackenzie was saying, "and it iss the Loch of the Mill; and over there, that is Loch-a-Bhaile, and that iss the Loch of the Town; but where iss the loch and the town now? It wass many hundreds of years before there will be numbers of people in this place; and you will come to Dun Charlobhaidh, which is a great castle, by and by. And what wass it will drive away the people, and leave the land to the moss, but that there wass no one to look after them? 'When the natives will leave Islay, farewell to the peace of Scotland.' That iss a good proverb. And if they have no one to mind them, they will go away altogether. And there is no people more obedient than the people of the Highlands – not anywhere; for you know that we say: 'Is it the truth, as if you were speaking before kings?' And now, there is the castle, and there wass many people living here when they could build that."

It was, in truth, one of those circular forts, the date of which has given rise to endless conjecture and discussion. Perched up on a hill, it overlooked a number of deep and narrow valleys that ran landward, while the other side of the hill sloped down to the sea-shore. It was a striking object, this tumbling mass of dark stones standing high over the green hollows and over the light plain of the sea. Was there not here material for another sketch for Sheila? While Lavender had gone away over the heights and hollows to choose his point of view a rough and ready luncheon had been spread out in the wagonette, and when he returned, perspiring and considerably blown, he found old Mackenzie measuring out equal portions of peat-water and whisky, Duncan flicking the enormous "clegs" from

off the horses' necks, Ingram trying to persuade Sheila to have some sherry out of a flask he carried, and everybody in very good spirits over such an exciting event as a roadside luncheon on a summer forenoon.

The King of Borva had by this time become excellent friends with the young stranger who had ventured into his dominions. When the old gentleman had sufficiently impressed on everybody that he had observed all necessary precautions in studying the character and inquiring into the antecedents of Lavender, he could not help confessing to a sense of lightness and vivacity that the young man seemed to bring with him and shed around him. Nor was this matter of the sketches the only thing that had particularly recommended Lavender to the old man. Mackenzie had a most distinct dislike to Gaelic songs. He could not bear the monotonous melancholy of them. When Sheila, sitting by herself, would sing these strange old ballads of an evening, he would suddenly enter the room, probably find her eyes filled with tears, and then he would in his inmost heart devote the whole of Gaelic minstrelsy and all its authors to the infernal gods. Why should people be forever maddening themselves with the stories of other folks' misfortunes? It was bad enough for those poor people, but they had borne their sorrows and died, and were at peace. Surely it was better that we should have songs about ourselves – drinking or fighting, if you like – to keep up the spirits, to lighten the serious cares of life, and drown for a while the responsibility of looking after a whole population of poor, half-ignorant, unphilosophical creatures.

"Look now," he would say, speaking of his own tongue, "look at this teffle of a language! It has no present tense to its verbs; the people they are always looking forward to a melancholy future or looking back to a melancholy past. In the name of Kott, hef we not got ourselves to live? This day we live in is better than any day that wass before or iss to come, bekass it is here we are alive. And I will hef no more of these songs about crying, and crying, and crying!"

Now Sheila and Lavender, in their musical mutual confidences, had at an early period discovered that each of them knew something of the older English duets, and forthwith they tried a few of them, to Mackenzie's extreme delight. Here, at last, was a sort of music he could understand – none of your moanings of widows and cries of luckless girls to the sea, but good commonsense songs, in which the lads kissed the lasses with a will, and had a good drink afterward and a dance on the green on their homeward way. There was fun in those happy May-fields, and good health and briskness in the ale-house choruses, and throughout them all a prevailing cheerfulness and contentment with the conditions of life certain to recommend itself to the contemplative mind.

Mackenzie never grew tired of hearing those simple ditties. He grew confidential with the young man, and told him that those fine, commonsense songs recalled pleasant scenes to him. He, himself, knew something of English village life. When he had been up to see the great Exhibition, he had gone to visit a friend living in Brighton, and he had surveyed the country with an observant eye. He had remarked several village-greens, with the May-poles standing here and there in front of the cottages, emblazoned with beautiful banners. He had, it is true, fancied that the May-pole should be in the centre of the green; but the manner in which the waves of population swept here and there, swallowing up open spaces and so forth, would account to a philosophical person for the fact that the May-poles were now close to the village shops.

"Drink to me only with thine eyes," hummed the King of Borva to himself as he sent the two little horses along the coast road on this warm Summer day. He had heard the song for the first time on the previous evening. He had no voice to speak of; he had missed the air, and these were all the words he remembered; but it was a notable compliment, all the same, to the young man who had brought these pleasant tunes to the island.

And so they drove on through the keen salt air, with the sea shining beside them and the sky shining over them; and in the afternoon they arrived at the small, remote and solitary inn of Barvas, placed near the confluence of several rivers that flow through Loch Barvas (or Barabbas) to the sea. Here they proposed to stop the night, so that Lavender, when his room had been assigned to

him, begged to be left alone for an hour or two, that he might throw a little color into his sketch of Callernish. What was there to see at Barvas? Why, nothing but the channels of the brown streams, some pasture land and a few huts, then the unfrequented lake, and beyond that, some ridges of white sand standing over the shingly beach of the sea. He would join them at dinner. Mackenzie protested in a mild way; he really wanted to see how the island was to be illustrated by the stranger. There was a greater protest, mingled with compassion and regret, in Sheila's eyes; but the young man was firm. So they let him have his way, and gave him full possession of the common sitting-room, while they set off to visit the school and the Free Church manse and what not in the neighborhood.

Mackenzie had ordered dinner at eight, to show that he was familiar with the ways of civilized life; and when they returned at that hour, Lavender had two sketches finished.

"Yes, they are very good," said Ingram, who was seldom enthusiastic about his friend's work.

But old Mackenzie was so vastly pleased with the picture, which represented his native place in the brightest of sunshine and colors, that he forgot to assume a critical air. He said nothing against the rainy and desolate version of the scene that had been given to Sheila – it was good enough to please the child. But here was something brilliant, effective, cheerful; and he alarmed Lavender not a little by proposing to get one of the natives to carry this treasure, then and there, back to Borvapist. Both sketches were ultimately returned to his book, and then Sheila helped him to remove his artistic apparatus from the table on which their plain and homely meal was to be placed. As she was about to follow her father and Ingram, who had left the room, she paused for a moment, and said to Lavender, with a look of frank gratitude in her eyes: "It is very good of you to have pleased my papa so much. I know when he is pleased, though he does not speak of it; and it is not often he will be so much pleased."

"And you, Sheila?" said the young man, unconscious of the familiarity he was using, and only remembering that she had scarcely thanked him for the other sketch.

"Well, there is nothing that will please me so much as to see him pleased," she said, with a smile.

He was about to open the door for her, but he kept his hand on the handle, and said, earnestly enough: "But that is such a small matter – an hour's work. If you only knew how gladly I would live all my life here if only I could do you some greater service –"

She looked a little surprised, and then for one brief second reflected. English was not wholly familiar to her; perhaps she had failed to catch what he really meant. But at all events she said, gravely and simply: "You would soon tire of living here; it is not always a holiday." And then, without lifting her eyes to his face, she turned to the door, and he opened it for her, and she was gone.

It was about ten o'clock when they went outside for their evening stroll, and all the world had grown enchanted since they had seen it in the colors of the sunset. There was no night, but a strange clearness over the sky and the earth, and down in the South the moon was rising over the Barvas hills. In the dark-green meadows the cattle were still grazing. Voices of children could be heard in the far distance, with the rumbling of a cart coming through the silence, and the murmur of the streams flowing down to the loch. The loch itself lay like a line of dusky yellow in a darkened hollow near the sea, having caught on its surface the pale glow of the Northern heavens, where the sun had gone down hours before. The air was warm, and yet fresh with the odors of the Atlantic, and there was a scent of Dutch clover coming across from the sandy pastures nearer the coast. The huts of the small hamlet could but faintly be made out beyond the dark and low-lying pastures, but a long, pale line of blue smoke lay in the motionless air, and the voices of the children told of open doors. Night after night this same picture, with slight variations of position, had been placed before the stranger who had come to view these solitudes, and night after night it seemed to him to grow more beautiful. He could put down on paper the outlines of an every-day landscape, and give them a dash of brilliant color to look well on a wall; but how to carry away, except in the memory, any impression of the strange, lambent darkness, the tender hues, the loneliness and the pathos of those Northern twilights?

They walked down by the side of one of the streams towards the sea. But Sheila was not his companion on this occasion. Her father laid hold of him, and was expounding to him the rights of capitalists and various other matters.

But by and by Lavender drew his companion on to talk of Sheila's mother; and here, at least, Mackenzie was neither tedious nor ridiculous nor unnecessarily garrulous. It was with a strange interest the young man heard the elderly man talk of his courtship, his marriage, the character of his wife, and her goodness and beauty. Was it not like looking at a former Sheila? and would not this Sheila now walking before him go through the same tender experiences, and be admired and loved and petted by everybody as this other girl had been, who brought with her the charm of winning ways, and a gentle nature, into these rude wilds? It was the first time he had heard Mackenzie speak of his wife, and it turned out to be the last; but from that moment the older man had something of dignity in the eyes of this younger man, who had merely judged him by his little foibles and eccentricities, and would have been ready to dismiss him contemptuously as a buffoon. There was something, then, behind that powerful face, with its deep cut lines, its heavy eyebrows, and piercing and sometimes sad eyes, besides a mere liking for tricks of childish diplomacy? Lavender began to have some respect for Sheila's father, and made a resolution to guard against the impertinence of humoring him too ostentatiously.

Was it not hard, though, that Ingram, who was so cold and unimpressible, who smiled at the notion of marrying, and who was probably enjoying his pipe quite as much as Sheila's familiar talk, should have the girl all to himself on this witching night? They reached the shores of the Atlantic. There was not a breath of wind coming in from that sea, but the air seemed even sweeter and cooler as they sat down on the great bank of shingle. Here and there birds were calling, and Sheila could distinguish each one of them. As the moon rose a faint golden light began to tremble here and there on the waves, as if some subterranean caverns were lit up and sending up to the surface faint and fitful rays of their splendor. Farther along the coast the tall banks of white sand grew white in the twilight, and the outlines of the dark pasture-land behind grew more distinct.

But when they rose to go back to Barvas the moonlight had grown full and clear, and the long and narrow loch had a pathway of gold across, stretching from the reeds and sedges of the one side to the reeds and sedges of the other. And now Ingram had gone on to join Mackenzie, and Sheila walked behind with Lavender, and her face was pale and beautiful in the moonlight.

"I shall be very sorry when I have to leave Lewis," he said, as they walked along the path leading through the sand and the clover; and there could be no doubt that he felt the regret expressed in the words.

"But it is no use to speak of leaving us yet," said Sheila, cheerfully; "it is a long time before you will go away from the Lewis."

"And I fancy I shall always think of the island just as it is now – with the moonlight over there, and a loch near, and you walking through the stillness. We have had so many evening walks like this."

"You will make us very vain of our island," said the girl with a smile, "if you will speak like that always to us. Is there no moonlight in England? I have pictures of English scenery that will be far more beautiful than any we have here; and if there is the moon here, it will be there too. Think of the pictures of the river Thames that my papa showed you last night –"

"Oh, but there is nothing like this in the South," said the young man impetuously. "I do not believe there is in the world anything so beautiful as this. Sheila, what would you say if I resolved to come and live here always?"

"I should like that very much – more than you would like it, perhaps," she said, with a bright laugh.

"That would please you better than for you to go always and live in England, would it not?"

"But that is impossible," she said. "My papa would never think of living in England."

For some time after he was silent. The two figures in front of them walked steadily on, an occasional roar of laughter from the deep chest of Mackenzie startling the night air, and telling of Ingram's being in a communicative mood. At last Lavender said: "It seems to me a great pity that you should live in this remote place, and have so little amusement, and see so few people of tastes and education like your own. Your papa is so much occupied – he is so much older than you, too – that you must be left to yourself so much; whereas if you had a companion of your own age, who could have the right to talk frankly to you, and go about with you and take care of you."

By this time they had reached the little wooden bridge crossing the stream, and Mackenzie and Ingram had got to the inn, where they stood in front of the door in the moonlight. Before ascending the steps of the bridge, Lavender, without pausing in his speech, took Sheila's hand and said suddenly: "Now, don't let me alarm you, Sheila, but suppose at some distant day – as far away as you please – I came and asked you to let me be your companion then and always, wouldn't you try?"

She looked up with a startled glance of fear in her eyes, and withdrew her hand from him.

"No, don't be frightened," he said, quite gently. "I don't ask you for any promise. Sheila, you must know I love you – you must have seen it. Will you not let me come to you at some future time – a long way off – that you may tell me then? Won't you try to do that?"

There was more in the tone of his voice than in his words. The girl stood irresolute for a second or two, regarding him with a strange, wistful, earnest look; and then a great gentleness came into her eyes, and she put out her hand to him and said in a low voice, "perhaps."

But there was something so grave and simple about her manner at this moment that he dared not somehow receive it as a lover receives the first admission of love from the lips of a maiden. There had been something of a strange inquiry in her face as she regarded him for a second or two; and now that her eyes were bent on the ground, it seemed to him that she was trying to realize the full effect of the concession she had made. He would not let her think. He took her hand and raised it respectfully to his lips, and then he led her forward to the bridge. Not a word was spoken between them while they crossed the shining space of moonlight to the shadow of the house; and as they went in-doors he caught but one glimpse of her eyes, and they were friendly and kind toward him, but evidently troubled. He saw no more that night.

So he had asked Sheila to be his wife, and she had given him some timid encouragement as to the future. Many a time within these last few days had he sketched out an imaginative picture of the scene. He was familiar with the passionate rapture of lovers on the stage, in books, and in pictures; and he had described himself (to himself) as intoxicated with joy, anxious to let the whole world know of his good fortune, and above all to confide the tidings of his happiness to his constant friend and companion. But now, as he sat in one corner of the room, he almost feared to be spoken to by the two men who sat at the table with steaming glasses before them. He dared not tell Ingram: he had no wish to tell him, even if he had got him alone. And as he sat there and recalled the incident that had just occurred by the side of the little bridge, he could not wholly understand its meaning. There had been none of the eagerness, the coyness, the tumult of joy he had expected; all he could remember clearly was the long look that the large, earnest, troubled eyes had fixed upon him, while the girl's face, grown pale in the moonlight, seemed somehow ghost-like and strange.

CHAPTER VII. AN INTERMEDDLER

BUT in the morning all these idle fancies fled with the life and color and freshness of a new day. Loch Barvas was ruffled into a dark blue by the Westerly wind, and doubtless the sea out there was running in, green and cold, to the shore. The sunlight was warm about the house. The trout were leaping in the shallow brown streams, and here and there a white butterfly fluttered across the damp meadows. Was not that Duncan down by the river, accompanied by Ingram? There was a glimmer of a rod in the sunshine; the two poachers were after trout for Sheila's breakfast.

Lavender dressed, went outside and looked about for the nearest way down to the stream. He wished to have a chance of saying a word to his friend before Sheila or her father should appear. And at last he thought he could do no better than go across to the bridge, and so make his way down to the banks of the river.

What a fresh morning it was, with all sorts of sweet scents in the air! And here, sure enough, was a pretty picture in the early light – a young girl coming over the bridge carrying a load of green grass on her back. What would she say if he asked her to stop for a moment that he might sketch her pretty costume? Her head-dress was a scarlet handkerchief, tied behind; she wore a tight-fitting bodice of cream-white flannel and petticoats of gray flannel, while she had a waist-belt and pouch of brilliant blue. Did she know of these harmonies of color or of the picturesqueness of her appearance as she came across the bridge in the sunlight? As she drew near she stared at the stranger with the big, dumb eyes of a wild animal. There was no fear, only a sort of surprised observation in them. And as she passed she uttered, without a smile, some brief and laconic salutation in Gaelic, which, of course, the young man could not understand. He raised his cap, however, and said "Good morning!" and went on, with a fixed resolve to learn all the Gaelic that Duncan could teach him.

Surely the tall keeper was in excellent spirits this morning. Long before he drew near, Lavender could hear, in the still of the morning, that he was telling stories about John the Piper, and of his adventures in such distant parts as Portree and Oban, and even in Glasgow.

"And it was Allan M'Gillivray, of Styornoway," Duncan was saying, as he industriously whipped the shallow runs of the stream, "will go to Glasgow with John; and they went through ta Crinan Canal. Wass you through ta Crinan Canal, sir?"

"Many a time."

"Ay, jist that. And I hef been told it iss like a river with ta sides o' a house to it; and what would Allan care for a thing like that, when he hass been to America more than twice or four times? And it wass when he fell into the canal, he was ferry nearly trooned for all that; and when they pulled him to ta shore he wass a ferry angry man. And this iss what John says that Allan will say when he wass on the side of the canal: 'Kott,' says he, 'if I was trooned here, I would show my face in Styornoway no more.' But perhaps it iss not true, for he will tell many lies, does John the Piper, to hef a laugh at a man."

"The Crinan Canal is not to be despised, Duncan," said Ingram, who was sitting on the red sand of the bank, "when you are in it."

"And do you know what John says that Allan will say to him the first time they went ashore at Glasgow?"

"I am sure I don't."

"It was many years ago, before that Allan will be going many times to America, and he will neffer hef seen such fine shops and ta big houses and hundreds and hundreds of people, every one with shoes on their feet. And he will say to John, 'John, ef I had known in time I should hef been born here.' But no one will believe it iss true, he is such a teffle of a liar, that John; and he will hef some stories about Mr. Mackenzie himself, as I hef been told, that he will tell when he goes to Styornoway. But John is a ferry cunning fellow, and will not tell any such stories in Borva."

"I suppose if he did, Duncan, you would dip him in Loch Roag."

"Oh, there iss more than one," said Duncan, with a grim twinkle in his eye – "there iss more than one that would hef a joke with him if he was to tell stories about Mr. Mackenzie."

Lavender had been standing listening, unknown to both. He now went forward and bade them good-morning, and then, having had a look at the trout that Duncan had caught, pulled Ingram up from the bank, put his arm in his and walked away with him.

"Ingram," he said, suddenly, with a laugh and a shrug, "you know I always come to you when I'm in a fix."

"I suppose you do," said the other, "and you are always welcome to whatever help I can give you. But sometimes it seems to me you rush into fixes with the sort of notion that I am responsible for getting you out."

"I can assure you nothing of the kind is the case. I could not be so ungrateful. However, in the meantime – that is – the fact is, I asked Sheila last night if she should marry me."

"The devil you did!"

Ingram dropped his companion's arm and stood looking at him.

"Well, I knew you would be angry," said the younger man in a tone of apology. "And I know I have been too precipitate, but I thought of the short time we should be remaining here, and of the difficulty of getting an explanation made at another time; and it was really only to give her a hint as to my own feelings that I spoke. I could not bear to wait any longer."

"Never mind about yourself," said Ingram, somewhat curtly. "What did Sheila say?"

"Well, nothing definite. What could you expect a girl to say after so short an acquaintance? But this I can tell you, that the proposal is not altogether distasteful to her, and that I have permission to speak to her at some future time, when we have known each other longer."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure?"

"Certain."

"There is no mistake about her silence, for example, that might have led you into misinterpreting her wishes altogether?"

"Nothing of the kind is possible. Of course I could not ask the girl for any promise, or anything of that sort. All I asked was, whether she would allow me at some future time to ask her more definitely; and I am so well satisfied with her reply that I am convinced I shall marry her."

"And is this the fix you wish me to help you out of?" said Ingram, rather coldly.

"Now, Ingram," said the younger man in penitential tones, "don't cut up rough about it. You know what I mean. Perhaps I have been hasty and inconsiderate about it; but one thing you may be sure, that Sheila will never have to complain of me if she marries me. You say I don't know her yet, but there will be plenty of time before we are married. I don't propose to carry her off to-morrow morning. Now, Ingram, you know what I mean about helping me in the fix – helping me with her father you know, and with herself, for the matter of that. You can do anything with her, she has such a belief in you. You should hear how she talks of you – you never heard anything like it."

It was an innocent bit of flattery, and Ingram smiled good-naturedly at the boy's ingenuousness. After all, was he not more loveable and more sincere in this little bit of simple craft, used in the piteousness of his appeal, than when he was giving himself the airs of a man-about-town, and talking of women in a fashion which, to do him justice, expressed nothing of his real sentiments?

Ingram walked on, and said in his slow and deliberate way, "You know I opposed this project of yours from the first. I don't think you have acted fairly by Sheila or her father, or myself who brought you out here. But if Sheila has been drawn into it, why, then, the whole affair is altered, and we've got to make the best of a bad business."

"I was sure you would say that," exclaimed the younger man with a brighter light appearing on his face. "You may call me all the hard names you like; I deserve them all, and more. But then, as you say, since Sheila is in it, you'll do your best, won't you?"

Frank Lavender could not make out why the taciturn and sallow-faced man walking beside him seemed to be greatly amused by this speech, but he was in no humor to take offence. He knew that once Ingram had promised him his help he would not lack all the advocacy, the advice, and even the money – should that become necessary – that a warm-hearted and disinterested friend could offer. Many and many a time Ingram had helped him, and now he was to come to his assistance in the most serious crisis of his life. Ingram would remove Sheila's doubts. Ingram would persuade old Mackenzie that girls had to get married some time or other, and that Sheila ought to live in London. Ingram would be commissioned to break the news to Mrs. Lavender. But here, when the young man thought of the interview with his aunt which he would have to encounter, a cold shiver passed through his frame. He would not think of it. He would enjoy the present hour. Difficulties only grew the bigger the more they were looked at; when they were left to themselves they frequently disappeared. It was another proof of Ingram's kindness that he had not even mentioned the old lady down in Kensington who was likely to have something to say about this marriage.

"There are a great many difficulties in the way," said Ingram, thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Lavender, with much eagerness, "but then, look! You may be sure that if we get over these, Sheila will know well who managed it, and she will not be ungrateful to you, I think. If we ever should be married I am certain she will always look on you as her greatest friend."

"It is a big bribe," said the elder man, perhaps a trifle sadly; and Lavender looked at him with some vague return of a suspicion that some time or other Ingram must himself have been in love with Sheila.

They returned to the inn, where they found Mackenzie busy with a heap of letters and newspapers that had been sent across to him from Stornoway. The whole of the breakfast-table was littered with wrappers and big blue envelopes; where was Sheila, who usually waited on her father at such times to keep his affairs in order?

Sheila was outside, and Lavender saw her through the open window. Was she not waiting for him, that she should pace up and down by herself, with her face turned away from the house? He immediately went out and went over to her, and she turned to him as he approached. He fancied she looked a trifle pale, and far less bright and joyous than the ordinary Sheila.

"Mr. Lavender," she said, walking away from the house, "I wish very much to speak to you for a moment. Last night it was all a misfortune that I did not understand; and I wish you to forget that a word was ever spoken about that."

Her head was bent down and her speech was low and broken; what she failed to explain in words her manner explained for her. But her companion said to her, with alarm and surprise in his tone: "Why, Sheila! You cannot be so cruel! Surely you need not feel any embarrassment through so slight a promise. It pledges you to nothing – it leaves you quite free; and some day, if I come and ask you then a question I have not asked you yet, then will be time enough to give me an answer."

"Oh, no, no!" said the girl, obviously in great distress, "I cannot do that. It is unjust to you to let you think of it and hope about it. It was last night everything was strange to me – I did not understand then – but I have thought about it all the night through, and now I know."

"Sheila!" called her father from the inside of the inn, and she turned to go.

"But you do not ask that, do you?" he said. "You are only frightened a little bit just now, but that will go away. There is nothing to be frightened about. You have been thinking over it, and imagining impossible things; you have been thinking of leaving Borva altogether – "

"Oh, that I can never do!" she said, with a pathetic earnestness.

"But why think of such a thing?" he said. "You need not look at all the possible troubles of life when you take such a simple step as this. Sheila, don't be hasty in any such resolve; you may

be sure all the gloomy things you have been thinking of will disappear when we get close to them. And this is such a simple thing. I don't ask you to say you will be my wife – I have no right to ask you yet – but I have only asked permission of you to let me think of it; and even Mr. Ingram sees no great harm in that.”

“Does *he* know?” she said, with a start of surprise and fear.

“Yes,” said Lavender, wishing he had bitten his tongue in two before he had uttered the word. “You know we have no secrets from each other; and to whom could I go for advice but to your oldest friend?”

“And what did he say?” she asked, with a strange look in her eyes.

“Well, he sees a great many difficulties, but he thinks they will easily be got over.”

“Then,” she said, with her eyes again cast down and a certain sadness in her tone, “I must explain to him, too, and tell him I had no understanding of what I said last night.”

“Sheila, you won't do that!” urged the young man. “It means nothing – it pledges you to nothing.”

“Sheila! Sheila!” cried her father, cheerily, from the window, “come in and let us hef our breakfast.”

“Yes, papa,” said the girl, and she went into the house, followed by her companion.

But how could she find an opportunity of making this explanation? Shortly after breakfast the wagonette was at the door of the little Barvas inn, and Sheila came out of the house and took her place in it with an unusual quietness of manner and hopelessness of look. Ingram, sitting opposite to her, and knowing nothing of what had taken place, fancied that this was but an expression of girlish timidity, and that it was his business to interest her and amuse her until she should forget the strangeness and newness of her position. Nay, as he had resolved to make the best of matters as they stood, and as he believed that Sheila had half confessed to a special liking for his friend from the South, what more fitting thing could he do than endeavor to place Lavender in the most favorable light in her eyes? He began to talk of all the brilliant and successful things the young man had done as fully as he could before himself. He contrived to introduce pretty anecdotes of Lavender's generosity; and there were plenty of these, for the young fellow had never a thought of consequences if he was touched by a tale of distress, and if he could help the sufferer either with his own or any one else's money. Ingram talked of all their excursions together, in Devonshire, in Brittany and elsewhere, to impress on Sheila how well he knew his friend and how long their intimacy had lasted. At first the girl was singularly reserved and silent, but somehow, as pleasant recollections were multiplied, and as Lavender seemed to have been always the associate and companion of this old friend of hers, some brighter expression came into her face and she grew more interested. Lavender, not knowing whether or not to take her decision of that morning as final, and not wholly perceiving the aim of this kindly chat on the part of his friend, began to see, at least, that Sheila was pleased to hear the two men help out each other's stories about their pedestrian excursions, and that she at last grew bold enough to look up and meet his eyes in a timid fashion when she asked him a question.

So they drove along by the side of the sea, the level and well-made road leading them through miles and miles of rough moorland, with here and there a few huts or a sheep-fold to break the monotony of the undulating sky-line. Here and there, too, there were great cuttings of the peat-moss, with a thin line of water in the foot of the deep, black trenches. Sometimes, again, they would escape altogether from any traces of human habitation, and Duncan would grow excited in pointing out to Miss Sheila the young grouse that had run off the road into the heather, where they stood and eyed the passing carriage with anything but a frightened air. And while Mackenzie hummed something resembling, but very vaguely resembling, “Love in thine eyes sits beaming,” and while Ingram, in his quiet, desultory, and often sardonic fashion, amused the young girl with stories of her lover's bravery and kindness and dare-devil escapades, the merry trot of the horses beat time to the bells on their

necks, the fresh West wind blew a cloud of white dust away over the moorland behind them, there was a blue sky shining all around them, and the blue Atlantic basking in the light.

They stopped a few moments at both the hamlets of Suainabost and Tabost to allow Sheila to pay a hurried visit to one or two of the huts, while Mackenzie, laying hold of some of the fishermen he knew, got them to show Lavender the curing-house, in which the young gentleman professed himself profoundly interested. They also visited the school-house, and Lavender found himself beginning to look upon a two-storied building with windows as something imposing, and a decided triumph of human skill and enterprise. But what was the school-house of Tabost to the grand building at the Butt? They had driven away from the high-road by a path leading through long and sweet-smelling pastures of Dutch clover; they had got up from these sandy swathes to a table-land of rock; and here and there they got glimpses of fearful precipices leading sheer down to the boiling and dashing sea. The curious contortions of the rocks, the sharp needles of them springing in isolated pillars from out of the water, the roar of the eddying currents that swept through the chasms and dashed against the iron-bound shore, the wild sea-birds that flew about and screamed over the rushing waves and the surge, naturally enough drew the attention of the strangers altogether away from the land; and it was with a start of surprise they found themselves before an immense mass of yellow stone-work – walls, house, and tower – that shone in the sunlight. And here were the lighthouse-keeper and his wife, delighted to see strange faces and most hospitably inclined; insomuch that Lavender, who cared little for luncheon at any time, was constrained to take as much bread and cheese and butter and whisky as would have made a ploughman's dinner. It was a strange sort of a meal this, away out at the end of the world, as it were. The snug little room might have been in the Marylebone road; there were photographs about, a gay label on the whisky bottle, and other signs of an advanced civilization; but outside nothing but the wild precipices of the coast, a surging sea that seemed almost to surround the place, the wild screaming of the sea-birds, and a single ship appearing like a mere speck on the Northern horizon.

They had not noticed the wind much as they drove along; but now, when they went out on the high table-land of rock, it seemed to be blowing half a gale across the sea. The sunlight sparkled on the glass of the lighthouse, and the great yellow shaft of stone stretched away upward into a perfect blue. As clear a blue lay far beneath them when the sea came rushing in among the lofty crags and sharp pinnacles of rock, bursting into foam at their feet and sending long jets of white spray up into the air. In front of the great wall of rock the sea-birds wheeled and screamed, and on the points of some of the islands stood several scarts, motionless figures of jet black on the soft brown and green of the rock. And what was this island they looked down upon from over one of the bays? Surely a mighty reproduction by Nature herself of the Sphynx of the Egyptian plains. Could anything have been more striking and unexpected and impressive than the sudden discovery of this great mass of rock resting in the wild sea, its hooded head turned away toward the North and hidden from the spectator on land, its gigantic bulk surrounded by a foam of breakers? Lavender, with his teeth set hard against the wind, must needs take down the outlines of this strange scene upon paper, while Sheila crouched at her father's side for shelter, and Ingram was chiefly engaged in holding on to his cap.

"It blows here a bit," said Lavender amid the roar of the waves. "I suppose in the Winter-time the sea will sometimes break across this place?"

"Ay, and over the top of the light-house, too," said Mackenzie with a laugh, as though he was rather proud of the way his native seas behaved.

"Sheila," said Ingram, "I never saw *you* take refuge from the wind before."

"It is because we will be standing still," said the girl, with a smile which was scarcely visible, because she had half hidden her face in her father's great gray beard. "But when Mr. Lavender is finished we will go down to the great hole in the rocks that you will have seen before, and perhaps he will make a picture of that, too."

"You don't mean to say you would go down there, Sheila?" said Ingram, "and in this wind!"

"I have been down many times before."

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the kind, Sheila," said her father; "you will go back to the lighthouse if you like – yes, you may do that – and I will go down the rocks with Mr. Lavender; but it is not for a young lady to go about among the rocks, like a fisherman's lad that wants the birds' eggs or such nonsense."

It was quite evident that Mackenzie had very little fear of his daughter not being able to accomplish the descent of the rocks safely enough; it was a matter of dignity. And so Sheila was at length persuaded to go across the plain to a sheltered place, to await there until the others should clamber down to the great and naturally-formed tunnel through the rocks that the artist was to sketch.

Lavender was ill at ease. He followed his guide mechanically as they made their way, in zigzag fashion, down the precipitous slopes and over slippery plateaus; and when at last he came in sight of the mighty arch, the long cavern, and the glimmer of sea and shore that could be seen through it, he began to put down the outlines of the picture as rapidly as possible, but with little interest in the matter. Ingram was sitting on the bare rocks beside him, Mackenzie was some distance off – should he tell his friend of what Sheila had said in the morning? Strict honesty, perhaps, demanded as much, but the temptation to say nothing was great. For it was evident that Ingram was now well inclined to the project, and would do his best to help it on; whereas, if once he knew that Sheila had resolved against it, he, too, might take some sudden step – such as insisting on their immediate return to the midland – which would settle the matter forever. Sheila had said she would herself make the necessary explanation to Ingram, but she had not done so: perhaps she might lack the courage or an opportunity to do so, and in the meantime was not the interval altogether favorable to his chances? Doubtless she was a little frightened at first. She would soon get less timid, and would relent and revoke her decision of the morning. He would not, at present at any rate, say anything to Ingram.

But when they had got up again to the summit of the rocks, an incident occurred that considerably startled him out of these vague and anxious speculations. He walked straight over to the sheltered spot in which Sheila was waiting. The rushing of the wind doubtless drowned the sound of his footsteps, so that he came on her unawares; and on seeing him she rose suddenly from the rock on which she had been sitting, with some effort to hide her face away from him. But he had caught a glimpse of something in her eyes that filled him with remorse.

"Sheila," he said, going forward to her, "what is the matter? What are you unhappy about?"

She could not answer; she held her face turned from him and cast down; and then, seeing her father and Ingram in the distance, she set out to follow them to the lighthouse. Lavender walking by her side, and wondering how he could deal with the distress that was only too clearly written on her face.

"I know it is I who have grieved you," he said in a low voice, "and I am very sorry. But if you will tell me what I can do to remove this unhappiness I will do it now. Shall I consider our talking together of last night as if it had not taken place at all?"

"Yes," she said in as low a voice, but clear and sad, and determined in its tone.

"And I shall speak no more to you about this affair until I go away altogether?"

And again she signified her assent, gravely and firmly.

"And then," he said, "you will soon forget all about it, for, of course, I shall never come back to Lewis again."

"Never?"

The word had escaped her unwillingly, and it was accompanied by a quick upturning of the face and a frightened look in the beautiful eyes.

"Do you wish me to come back?" he said.

"I should not wish you to go away from the Lewis through any fault of mine, and say that we should never see you again," said the girl in measured tones, as if she were nerving herself to make the admission, and yet fearful of saying too much.

By this time Mackenzie and Ingram had gone around the big wall of the light-house; there were no human beings on this lonely bit of heath but themselves. Lavender stopped her and took her hand, and said, "Don't you see, Sheila, how I must never come back to Lewis if all this is to be forgotten? And all I want you to say is, that I may come some day to see if you can make up your mind to be my wife. I don't ask that yet; it is out of the question, seeing how short a time you have known anything about me, and I cannot wish you to trust me as I can trust you. It is a very little thing I ask – only to give me a chance at some future time, and then, if you don't care for me sufficiently to marry me, or if anything stands in the way, all you need do is to send me a single word, and that will suffice. This is no terrible thing that I beg from you, Sheila. You needn't be afraid of it."

But she was afraid; there was nothing but fear and doubt and grief in her eyes, as she gazed in the unknown world laid open before her.

"Can't you ask someone to tell you that it is nothing dreadful – Mr. Ingram, for example?"

"I could not."

"Your papa, then," he said, driven to this desperate resource by his anxiety to save her from pain.

"Not yet – not just yet," she said, almost wildly; "for how could I explain to him? He would ask me what my wishes were; what could I say? I do not know; I cannot tell myself; and – and – I have no mother to ask." And here all the strain of self-control gave way, and the girl burst into tears.

"Sheila, dear Sheila," he said, "why don't you trust your own heart, and let that be your guide? Won't you say this one word, *Yes*, and tell me that I am to come back to Lewis some day, and ask to see you, and get a message from one look of your eyes? Sheila, may not I come back?"

If there was a reply it was so low that he scarcely heard it; but somehow – whether from the small hand that lay in his, or from the eyes that sent one brief message of trust and hope through their tears – his question was answered; and from that moment he felt no more misgivings, but let his love for Sheila shine out and blossom in whatever light of fancy and imagination he could bring to bear on it, without any doubts as to the future.

How the young fellow laughed and joked as the party drove away again from the Butt, down the long coast-road to Barvas! He was tenderly respectful and a little moderate in tone when he addressed Sheila, but with the others he gave way to a wild exuberance of spirits that delighted Mackenzie beyond measure. He told stories of the odd old gentlemen of his club, of their opinions, their ways, their dress. He sang the song of the Arethusa and the wilds of Lewis echoed with a chorus which was not just as harmonious as it might have been. He sang the "Jug of Punch," and Mackenzie said that was a teffle of a good song. He gave imitations of some of Ingram's companions at the Board of Trade, and showed Sheila what the inside of a government office was like. He paid Mackenzie the compliment of asking him for a drop of something out of his flask, and in return he insisted on the King smoking a cigar which, in point of age and sweetness and fragrance, was really the sort of a cigar you would naturally give to the man whose only daughter you wanted to marry.

Ingram understood all this, and was pleased to see the happy look that Sheila wore. He talked to her with even a greater assumption than usual of fatherly fondness; and if she was a little shy, was it not because she was conscious of so great a secret? He was even unusually complaisant to Lavender, and lost no opportunity of paying him indirect compliments that Sheila could overhear.

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