

A Hallowe'en Wraith

By William Black

I

The vast bulk of Ben Clebrig was dark in shadow, but the wide waters of Loch Naver shone a soft silver-gray in the moonlight, as Hector MacIntyre, keeper and forester in the far solitudes of Glengorm, came striding along the road toward Inver-Mudal. As he approached the little hamlet—which consists merely of the inn and its surroundings and one or two keepers' cottages—certain small points of red told him of its whereabouts among the black trees; and as he drew still nearer he thought he would let the good people there know of his coming. Hector had brought his pipes with him, for there were to be great doings on this Hallowe'en night; and now, when he had inflated the bag and tuned the drones, there sprang into the profound Silence reigning everywhere around the wild skirl of the "Hills of Glenorchy." Surely the sound would reach, and carry its message? If not, here was "Gillie, a Drover," played still more bravely; and again the proud strains of "The Glen's Mine!" By which time he had got near to the inn, and was about to turn down from the highway by the semicircular drive passing the front door.

But here he suddenly encountered a fearful sight. From out of the dusk of the wall surrounding the front garden there came three luminous objects—three globes of a dull saffron hue; and on each of these appeared the features of a face—eyes, mouth, and nose—all flaming in fire.

On beholding this terrible thing the tall, brown-bearded forester turned and fled; and the pipes told of his dismay; for they shrieked and groaned and made all sorts of indescribable noises, as if they too were in mortal alarm. Then Mrs. Murray's three children, with victorious shouts of laughter, pursued the tall forester, and kept waving before them the hollowed-out turnips with the bit of candle burning within. When he had got up to the corner of the road, Hector turned and addressed the children, who had come crowding round him, holding up their flaming turnips to cause him still further consternation.

"Well, now," said he, in the Gaelic, "that is a fearful thing to alarm any poor person with. Were you not thinking I should die of fright? And the pipes squealing as well, for they never saw anything like that before. But never mind, we are going down to the house now; and, do you know, Ronald, and Isabel, and you, little Shena—do you know, I have brought you some of the fir tops that grow in Glengorm. For it is a wonderful place, Glengorm; and the fir tops that grow on the larches there are not as the fir tops that grow anywhere else. They are very small, and they are round, and some are pink, and some are blue, and some are black and white, and some others—why, they have an almond inside them! Oh, it is a wonderful place, Glengorm! but it is not always you can get the fir tops from the larches; it is only on some great occasion like the Hallowe'en night; and let me see, now, if I put any of them in my pocket. Here, Ronald, take the pipes from me, and hold them properly on your shoulder—for one day you will be playing 'Miss Ramsay's Strathspey' as well as any one—and I will search my pockets, and see if I put any of those wonderful fir tops into them."

The children knew very well what all this preamble meant; but neither they nor their elders could have told how it was that Hector MacIntyre, every time he came to Inver-Mudal, brought with him packages of sweetmeats, though he lived in one of the most inaccessible districts in Sutherland, Glengorm being about two-and-twenty miles away from anywhere. However, here

were the precious little parcels; and when they had been distributed, Hector took his pipes again, and, escorted by his small friends, went down to the inn.

Well, Mr. Murray, the innkeeper, had also heard the distant skin of the pipes, and here he was at the door.

“How are you, Hector?” he asked, in the Gaelic. “And what is your news?”

“There is not much news in Glengorm,” was the answer.

“And when is your wedding to be?” Mr. Murray said. “We will make a grand day of that day, Hector. And I have been thinking I will get some of the lads to kindle a bonfire on the top of Ben Clebrig—a fire that they will see down in Ross-shire. And there’s many a pistol and many a gun will make a crack when you drive up to this door and bring your bride in. For I am one who believes in the old customs; and whether it is a wedding, or the New Year, or Hallowe’en night, I am for the old ways, and the Free Church ministers can say what they like. Now come away in, Hector, my lad, and take a dram after your long walk; there is plenty of hard work before you this evening; for Johnnie has broken his fiddle; and the lasses have not been asked to stand up to a reel for many a day.” And then he paused, and said: “And how is Flora Campbell, Hector? Have you any news of her?”

“No,” said the forester, in something of an undertone, and his face looked troubled. “I have had no letter for a while back; and I do not know what it means. Her sister that lives in Greenock was taken ill; and Flora said she must go down from Oban to see her; and that is the last I have heard. If I knew her sister’s address in Greenock, I would write and ask Flora why there was no letter for so long; but if you send a letter to one called Mary Campbell in such a big place as Greenock, what use is it?”

“But no news is good news, Hector,” said Mr. Murray, cheerfully. And therewith he led the way through a stone corridor into the great kitchen, where a considerable assemblage of lads and lasses were already engaged in noisy merriment and pastime.

The arrival of the tall forester and his pipes was hailed with general satisfaction; but there was no call as yet for the inspiriting music; in fact, this big kitchen was given over to the games of the children and the younger boys and girls, a barn having been prepared for supper, and for the celebration of occult Hallowe’en rites when the time came for their elders to take part in the festivities. At present there was a large tub filled with water placed in the middle of the floor; and there were apples in it; and the youngsters, with their hands behind their backs, were trying to snatch out an apple with their teeth. There was many a sousing of heads, of course—an excellent trial of temper; while sometimes a bolder wight than usual would pursue his prize to the bottom, and try to fasten upon it there; or some shy young damsel would cunningly shove the apple over to the side of the tub, and succeed by mother-wit where masculine courage had failed. Then from the roof, suspended by a cord, hung a horizontal piece of wood, at one end of which was an apple, at the other a lighted tallow candle; and when the cord had been twisted up and then set free again, causing the transverse piece of wood to whirl round, the competitor was invited to snatch with his mouth at the apple, failing to do which secured him a rap on the cheek from the guttering candle. There were all sorts of similar diversions going forward (the origin and symbolism of them little dreamt of by these light-hearted lads and lasses) when little Isabel Murray came up to the big, handsome, good-natured-looking forester from Glengorm.

“Will you burn a nut with me, Elector?” she said, kindly.

“Indeed I will, Isabel, if you will take me for your sweetheart,” said he, in reply; “and now we will go to the fire, and see whether we are to be at peace and friendship all our lives.”

They went to the hearth; they put the two nuts among the blazing peats; and awaited the response of the oracle. Could any augury have been more auspicious? The two nuts lay together, burning steadily and quickly—a soft love-flame—no angry sputtering, no sudden explosion and separation.

“Now do you see that, lamb of my heart?” said the tall forester, using a familiar Gaelic phrase.

And no doubt the little lass was very highly pleased. However, at this moment up came Mrs. Murray with the announcement that the children might continue at their games some time longer, but that the grown-up folk were wanted in the barn, where supper was awaiting them.

It was a joyous scene. The huge peat fire was blazing brightly; the improvised chandelier was studded with candles; there were a couple of lamps on the long table, which was otherwise most sumptuously furnished. And when Hector MacIntyre, in his capacity of piper, had played the people in to the stirring strains of “The Marchioness of Tweeddale’s Delight,” he put the pipes aside, and went and took the seat that had been reserved for him by the side of the fair-haired Nelly, who was very smartly dressed for this great occasion, as befitted the reigning beauty of the neighborhood.

“You’ll be sorry that Flora is not here tonight,” said the fair-haired damsel, rather saucily, to her brown-bearded companion; “and no one to take her place. I suppose there was no one in Sutherland good enough for you, Hector, that you must take up with a lass from Islay. And there is little need for you to dip your sleeve in the burn and hang it up to dry when you go to bed, so that the fire may show you your sweetheart, for well you know already who that is. Well, well, you will have no heart for the merrymaking to-night; for a lad that has his sweetheart away in the south has no heart for anything.”

“You’ll just mind this, Nelly,” said the forester, “not to carry your merrymaking too far this night. Alastair Ross,” he continued, glancing down the table toward a huge, rough, red-bearded drover who was seated there, “is not the man to be made a fool of; and if that young fellow Scruple does not take heed, he will find himself gripped by the waist some fine dark evening and flung into Loch Naver.”

“Oh, you are like all the rest, Hector!” said the coquettish Nelly, with some impatience. “Every one of you is jealous of Johnnie Scruple, because he is neatly dressed and has good manners and is civil spoken—”

“What is he doing here at all?” said Hector, with a frown. “Is it a fine thing to see a young man idling about a place with his hands in his pockets just because his uncle is the landlord? If he has learned his fine manners in the towns, why does he not earn his living in the towns? He is no use here.”

“Oh, no,” said Nelly, with a toss of her head; “perhaps he is not much use on the hill; perhaps he could not set traps and shoot hawks. But he knows all the new songs from the theatres, and he can dance more steps than any one in Sutherland.”

“Well, this is what I am telling you, Nelly,” her companion said, with some firmness. “I do not know what there is between you and Alastair Ross. If there is anything, as people say, then do not make him an angry man. Let Scruple alone. An honest lass should beware of a town dandy like that.”

Here this private little conversation was interrupted by Mr. Murray, who rose at the head of the table and called upon the company to fill their glasses. He wished to drink with them, and they did not seem loth. When Hector and his pretty companion found opportunity to resume their talk, he discovered that Nelly was in quite a different mood.

“Well, now, it is a good thing, Hector, that every one knows that you and Flora are to be married; for I can talk to you without Alastair getting red in the face with rage. And when we go out to pull the cabbage-stalks, will you go with me? I know the way into the garden better than you; and we can both go blindfold if you will take my hand.”

“But what need is there for you to pull a cabbage-stalk, lass?” said he. “Do you not know already what like your husband is to be?”

Again the pretty Nelly tossed her head. “Who can tell what is to happen in the world?”

“And maybe you would rather not pull a stalk that was tall and straight and strong—that would mean Alastair?” said her companion, glancing at her suspiciously. “Maybe you would rather find you had got hold of a withered old stump with a lot of earth at the root—a decrepit old man with plenty of money in the bank? Or maybe you are wishing for one that is slim and supple and not so tall—for one that might mean Johnnie Scruple?”

“I am wishing to know who the man is to be, and that is all,” said Nelly, with some affectation of being offended. “And what harm can there be in doing what every one else is doing?”

However, not all Nelly’s blandishments and petulant coquetries could induce Hector MacIntyre to take part in this appeal to the divination of the kale-yard; for when, after supper, the lads and lasses went away blindfold to pull the “custock” that was to reveal to them the figure and circumstances of their future spouse, the big forester remained to have a quiet smoke with the married keepers and shepherds, who had no interest in such matters. It was noticed that he was unusually grave—he who was ordinarily one of the lightest of the light-hearted. Naturally they put it down to the fact that among all the merrymaking and sweethearting and spying into the future of the younger people he alone had no companion, or rather not the companion whom he would have wished to have; for Flora, the young girl whom he was to marry, had left Inver-Mudal for the south in the preceding autumn. And when they had asked if Flora was quite well, and when he had answered “Oh, yes,” there was nothing further to be said.

II

Now on All-Hallows Eve there is one form of incantation which is known to be extremely, nay, terribly potent, when all others have failed. You go out by yourself, taking a handful of hemp-seed with you. You get to a secluded place, and begin to scatter the seed as you walk along the road. You say, “Hemp-seed, I sow thee; hemp-seed I sow thee; he who is to be my true love, appear now and show thee.” And if you look furtively over your shoulder you will behold the desired apparition following you.

When Nelly came back from consulting the oracle of the kale-yard, it appeared that she had received what oracles generally vouchsafe—a doubtful answer.

“What kind of custock did you pull, Nelly?” Hector asked of her.

“Well,” said she, “it is not much one way or the other. No, I cannot tell anything by it. But I am going out now to sow the hemp-seed, Hector; and I know I shall be terribly frightened—I shall be far too frightened to look over my shoulder; and this is what I want you to do for me: you will stop at the door of the inn and hide yourself; and I will go up the road and sow the hemp-seed; and if anything appears, you will see it. Will you do that, Hector? It is a clear night; you will be sure to see it if there is anything.”

He did not seem to be in the mood for taking part in these superstitious observances; but he was good-natured, and eventually followed her to the door. The little walled garden in front of the Inver-Mudal inn is shaped like a horseshoe, the two ends of the semicircle touching the main

highway at some distance apart. He saw Nelly go up toward the main road, and looked after her absently and without interest. Nay, he was so little thinking of his promised watch that, as she was some time over the sowing of the hemp-seed, he left the shadow of the inn door, and strolled away up to the main road by the other fork of the semicircular drive. It was a beautiful clear moonlight night; his thoughts were far away from these Hallowe'en diversions; he was recalling other evenings long ago, when Clebrig, as now, seemed joining earth and heaven, and when there was no sound but the murmuring of the burns through the trackless heather. The highway up there was white before him; on the other side was a plantation of young firs, black as jet. Not even the cry of a startled bird broke this perfect stillness; the wide world of mountain and loch and moor was plunged in sleep profound.

All at once his pipe, that he happened to be holding in his hand, dropped to his feet. There before him in the white highway, and between him and the black belt of firs, stood Flora Campbell, regarding him with eyes that said nothing, but only stared in a somewhat sad way, as it seemed. He was not paralyzed with terror at all. He had no time to ask himself what she was doing there, or how she had come there. Flora Campbell standing there in the road, and looking at him in silence. But the horror came when suddenly he saw that the white highway was empty. He began to shake and shiver as if with extremity of cold. He did not move; he could not move. He knew what had happened to him now. Flora Campbell's wraith had appeared to him. And with what message? The steady gaze of her eyes had told him nothing. If they were anything, they were mournful. Perhaps it was a token of farewell; perhaps it was an intimation of her death. Hardly knowing what he did, and trembling in every limb, he advanced a step or two, so that he could command the whole length of the highway. There was no sign of any living thing there. He could not recall how it was she first appeared; he could not tell in what manner she had gone away; he only knew that a few moments before Flora had been regarding him with steady, plaintive eyes, and that now he was alone with this moonlit road and the black plantation, and Clebrig rising far into the silent heavens.

Then there arose in his heart a wild resolve that, whatever this thing might portend, he must instantly make away for the south, to seek out Flora Campbell herself. She had something to say to him, surely, though those mournful eyes conveyed no intelligible message. Nay, if she were dead, if this were but a mute farewell, must he not know? Dazed, bewildered, filled with terrible misgivings of he knew not what, he slowly went back to the inn. He had some vague instinct that he must ask Mr. Murray for the loan of a stick if he were to set out now to cross the leagues of wild and mountainous country that lie between Inver-Mudal and the sea. Mr. Murray, as it chanced, was at the door.

"God's sake, Hector, what is the matter with you?" he exclaimed, in alarm, for there was a strange look in the man's face.

"I have seen something this night," was the answer, spoken slowly and in an undertone.

"Nonsense! nonsense!" the innkeeper said. "The heads of the young people are filled with foolishness on Hallowe'en, as every one knows; but you—you are not to be frightened by their stories."

"It has naught to do with Hallowe'en," said Hector, still with his eyes fixed on the ground, as if seeking to recall something. "Do you know what I have seen this night? I have seen the wraith of Flora Campbell—ay, as clear as daylight."

"I will not believe it, Hector," said Mr. Murray. "You have been hearing all those stories of the witches and fairies on Hallowe'en until your own head has been turned. Why, where did you see the wraith?"

“Up there in the road, and as clear as daylight, for that is the truth. It was Flora herself,” the tall forester made answer, not argumentatively, but as merely stating a fact that he knew.

“And did she come forward to you, or did she go away from you?” Mr. Murray asked, curiously.

“I—I am not sure,” Hector said, after a little hesitation. “No, I could not say. Perhaps I was not thinking of her. But all at once I saw her between me and the plantation, in the middle of the road; and for a moment I was not frightened; I thought it was Flora herself; then she was gone.

“For you know what they say, Hector,” Mr. Murray continued. “When a wraith appears, it is to tell you of a great danger; and if it comes forward to you, then the danger is over; but if it goes away from you, the person is dead.”

“Ay, ay; I have heard that too,” Hector murmured, as if in sombre reverie. Then he looked up, and said: “I am going away to the south.”

“Well, now, that is unfortunate, Hector,” the good-natured innkeeper said to him. “For to-morrow the mail comes north, and you will have to wait till the next day for the mail going south, to take you in to Lairg to catch the train.”

“I will not wait for the mail,” answered the forester, who, indeed, knew little about travelling by railway. “To-morrow is Wednesday: it is the day the big steamer starts from Loch Inver; perhaps I may be in time.”

“Loch Inver!” the other exclaimed. “And how are you going to get to Loch Inver from here, Hector?”

“Across the forest,” was the simple reply.

“Across the Reay Forest and down by Loch Assynt? That will be a fearful journey through the night!”

“I cannot rest here,” Hector said. “You will make some excuse for me to the lads and lasses. I will leave my pipes; Long Murdoch will do very well with them. And I will thank you to lend me a stick, Mr. Murray, for it will be a rough walk before I have done.”

Mr. Murray did more than that; he got his wife to make up a little packet of food, to which he added a flask of whiskey; and these he took out to the young man, along with a shepherd’s staff of stout hazel.

“Good-by, Hector!” said he. “I hope you will find all well in the south.”

“I do not know about that,” the forester answered, in an absent sort of fashion; “but I must go and see. There will be no peace of mind for me—there would not be one moment’s peace for me—otherwise. For who knows what Flora wanted to say to me?”

III

It was an arduous task he had set before him; for nine men out of ten it would have been an impossible one; but this young forester’s limbs knew not what fatigue was; and in his heart there burned a longing that could not be assuaged. Nor in ordinary circumstances would the loneliness of this night’s journey have mattered to him; but his nerves had been unstrung by the strange thing that had happened; and now, as he followed a shepherd’s track that led away into the higher moorlands south of the Mudal River, he was conscious of some mysterious influence surrounding him that was of far more immediate concern than the mere number of miles—some forty or fifty—he had to accomplish before noon of the next day. These vast solitudes into which he was penetrating were apparently quite voiceless and lifeless; and yet he felt as if they knew of his presence, and were regarding him. A white stone on a dark heather-covered knoll would

suddenly look like a human face; or again, he would be startled by the moonlight shining on a small tarn set among the black peat hags. There was no moaning of wind; but there was a distant murmuring of water; the rills were whispering to each other in the silence. As for the mountains—those lone sentinels, Ben Loyal and Ben Hope and Ben Hee—they also appeared to be looking down upon the desolate plain; but he did not heed them, they were too far away; it was the objects near him that seemed to know he was here, and to take sudden shapes as he went by.

Soon he was without even a shepherd's track to guide him; but he knew the lay of the land; and he held on in a line that would avoid the lochs, the deeper burns, and the steep heights of Meall-an-amair. The moonlight was a great help; indeed, at this period of his long through-the-night tramp he was chiefly engaged in trying to recall how it was he first became sensible that Flora Campbell's wraith appeared before him. He saw again—surely he would never forget to his dying day the most insignificant feature of the scene—the stone wall of the garden, the white road, the wire fence on the other side, and the black plantation of spruce and pine. What had he been thinking about? Not about Nelly; she was some distance in another direction, busy with her charms and incantations. No; he could not tell. The sudden apparition had startled him out of all memory. But what he was most anxious to convince himself was that the phantom had come toward him, rather than gone away from him, ere it disappeared, Mr. Murray's words had sunk deep, though he himself had been aware of the familiar superstition. But now all his endeavors to summon up an accurate recollection of what had taken place were of no avail. He knew not how he first became conscious that the wraith was there—Flora Campbell herself, as it seemed to him—nor how it was he suddenly found himself alone again. He had been terrified out of his senses; he had no power of observation left. This phantasm that looked so like a human being, that regarded him with pathetic eyes, that had some mysterious message to communicate, and yet was silent, had vanished as it had appeared, he could not tell how.

The hours went by; the moon was sinking toward the western bills. And still he toiled on through this pathless waste, sometimes getting into treacherous swamps, again having to ford burns swollen by the recent rains. He was soaked through to the waist; but little he heeded that; his thoughts were of the steamer that was to leave Loch Inver the next day. With the moon going down, darkness was slowly resuming her reign, and it became more difficult to make out the landmarks; but, at all events, the heavens remained clear, and he had the guidance of the stars. And still steadily and patiently and manfully he held on, getting without much serious trouble across the streams that feed Loch Fhiodaig, until eventually he struck the highway running northward from Loch Shin, and knew that so far, at least, he was in the right direction.

Leaving the Corrykinloch road again, he had once more to plunge into the trackless wilderness of rock and swamp and moorland; and the further he went through the black night the less familiar was he with the country. But he had a general knowledge; and what mattered half a dozen miles one way or the other, if only the dawn would show him Ben More on his left, and away before him the silver-gray waters of Loch Assynt? He was less conscious now of the sinister influences of these lonely solitudes; his nervous apprehensions had to give way before his dogged resolve to get out to the western shore in time to catch the steamer; all his attention was given to determining his course by the vague outlines of the higher hills. A wind had arisen, a cold, raw wind it was; but he cared nothing for that, unless, indeed, it should bring a smurr of rain and obliterate the landmarks altogether. How anxiously he prayed for the dawn! If this wind were to bring driving mists of rain, blotting out both earth and heaven, and limiting his vision to the space of moorland immediately surrounding him, where would be his guidance then? He

could not grope his way along the slopes that lie beneath Loch nan Scarir, nor yet across the streams that fall into Loch Fionn. So all the more resolutely he held on while as yet he could make out something of the land, dark against the tremulous stars.

Again and again he turned his head and scanned the east, with a curious mingling of impatience and hope and longing; and at length, to his unspeakable joy, he was able to convince himself that the horizon here was giving faint signs of the coming dawn. He went forward with a new confidence, with a lighter step. The horror of these awful solitudes would disappear with the declaring day; surely, surely, when the world had grown white again, he would behold before him, not this terrible black loneliness of mountain and mere, but the pleasant abodes of men, and trees, and the western ocean, and the red-funnelled steamer with its welcome smoke. The gray light in the east increased. He began to make out the features of the ground near him; he could tell a patch of heather from a deep hole; and could choose his way. The world seemed to broaden out. Everything, it is true, was as yet wan and spectral and ill-defined; but the silence was no longer awful; he had no further fear of the mists coming along to isolate him in the dark. By slow degrees, under the widening light of the sky, the various features of this wild country began to take more definite shape. Down there in the south lay the mighty mass of Ben More. On his right rose the sterile altitudes of Ben Uidhe. And at last, and quite suddenly, he came in view of the ruffled silvery surface of Loch Assynt, and the cottages of Inchnadamph, and the gray ruins of Ardvreck Castle on the promontory jutting out into the lake. The worst of the sore fight with solitude and the night was over. He gained the road, and his long swinging stride now stood him in good stead. Loch Assynt was soon left behind. He followed the windings of the river Inver. Finally he came in sight of the scattered little hamlet facing the western seas, with its bridge and its church and its pleasant woods and slopes, looking all so cheerful and home-like; and there also was the red-funnelled *Clansman* that was to carry him away to the south.

IV

That long and difficult struggle to get out to the western coast in time had so far demanded all his energy and attention; but now, in enforced idleness, as the heavy steamer ploughed her way across the blue waters of the Minch, his mind could go back upon what had happened the preceding night, and could also look forward with all sorts of dark, indefinite forebodings. He began to recall his first association with Flora Campbell, when she came to Auchnaver Lodge to help the old housekeeper there. He remembered how neat and trim she looked when she walked into Strathie Free Church of a Sunday morning; and how shy she was when he got to know her well enough to talk a little with her when they met, in their native tongue. Their courtship and engagement had the entire approval of Flora's master and mistress; for the old housekeeper at the lodge was now past work; and they proposed to install Hector's wife in her place, and give her a permanent situation. The wedding was to be in February or March; in April the young wife was to move into the lodge, to get it ready for the gentlemen coming up for the salmon-fishing. When the fishing and shooting of the year were over, Flora could return to her husband's cottage, and merely look in at the lodge from time to time to light a fire or two and keep the place aired. Meanwhile, for this present winter, she had taken a situation in Oban (she was a west Highland girl), and had remained there until summoned away to Greenock by the serious illness of her sister. Such was the situation; but who could tell now what was to become of all those fair prospects and plans? Was it to bid a last farewell to them and to him that the young Highland girl had appeared—saying good-by with such mournful eyes? The small parlor in his cottage—was

she never to see the little adornments he had placed there, all for her sake? Well, then, if what he feared had come true, no other woman should enter and take possession. There were dreams of Canada, of Cape Colony, of Australia in his brain as he sat there with bent brow and heavy heart, taking hardly any heed of the new shores they were now nearing.

This anguish of brooding became at length insupportable; in despair he went to the stevedore, and said he would be glad to lend a hand with the cargo as soon as the steamer was alongside the quay in Stornoway Harbor. And right hard he worked, too, hour after hour, feeding the steam crane that was swinging crates and boxes over and down into the hold. The time passed more easily in this fashion. His chum was a good-natured young fellow who seemed rather proud of his voice; at times he sang snatches of Gaelic songs—"Máiri bhinn mheall shuileach" (Mary of the bewitching eyes), or "C'aite 'n caidil an ribhinn?" (Where sleepest thou, dear maiden?). They were familiar songs; but there was one still more familiar that woke strange echoes in his heart; for Flora Campbell was a west-country girl, and of course her favorite was the well-known "Fear a bhata:"

"I climb the mountains and scan the ocean
For thee, my boatman, with fond devotion,
When shall I see thee?—to-day?—to-morrow?
Oh, do not leave me in lonely sorrow!
O my boatman, *na horo ailya*,
O my boatman, *na horo ailya*,
O my boatman, *na horo ailya*,
A hundred farewells to you, wherever you may be going."

That is how it begins in the English; but it was the Gaelic phrases that haunted his brain, and brought him remembrance of Flora's crooning voice, and of a certain autumn evening when he and she and some others went all the way down a Loch Naver to Inver-Mudal, Flora and he sitting together in the stern of the boat, and all of them singing the "Fear a bhata."

The *Clansman* left Stornoway that same night, groaning and thundering through the darkness on her way to Skye. Hector did not go below into the fore-cabin. He remained on deck, watching the solitary ray of some distant lighthouse, or perhaps turning his gaze upon the great throbbing vault overhead where Cassiopeia sat, throned upon her silver chair. More than once an aërolite shot swiftly across the clear heavens, leaving a faint radiance for a second or so in its wake; but he took no heed of these portents now. In other circumstances they might mean something; but now a more direct summons had come to him from the unknown world; the message had been delivered, though he had been unable to understand it; and he knew that what was to happen had now happened in that far town of Greenock. And as the slow hours went by, his impatience and longing increased almost to despair. The dark loom of land in the south appeared to come no nearer. The monotonous throbbing of the screw seemed as if it were to go on forever. And as yet there was no sign of the dawn.

But the new day, which promised to be quite insupportable in its tedium and in its fears, in reality brought him some distraction, and that was welcome enough. At Portree there came on board a middle-aged man of rather mean aspect, with broken nose, long upper lip, and curiously set small gray eyes. He carried a big bag which apparently held all his belongings, and that he threw on to the luggage on the forward deck.

"Where's this going to?" called the stevedore.

"Sure 'tis bound for the same place as mesilf," said the new-comer, facetiously; "and that's Philadelphia, begob!"

“We don’t call there,” retorted the stevedore, dryly; “and you’d better stick to your bundle if you want to see it at Greenock.”

And very soon it became apparent that the advent of this excited and voluble Irishman had brought new life into the steerage portion of the ship. He had a glass or two of whiskey. He talked to everybody within hearing about himself, his plans, his former experiences of the United States; and when gravelled for lack of matter, he would fall back on one invariable refrain: “Aw, begob! the Americans are the bhoys!” And in especial were his confidences bestowed on Hector MacIntyre, the shy and reserved Highlander listening passively and without protest to Paddy’s wild asseverations.

“Aw, the Americans are the divils, and no mistake!” he exclaimed. “But let me tell you this, sorr, that there’s one that’s cliverer than them, and that’s the Irish bhoys, begob! Sure they talk about the German vote—aw, bather-shin! ’Tis the Irish vote, sorr, that’s the masther; and we’ve got the newspapers. And where would the Republicans or the Dimocrats be widout us ?—tell me that av ye plaze! In this ould — counthry the Irishman is a slave; in Americay he’s the masther; and every mother’s son of them knows it! Aw, begob, sorr, that’s the place for a man! This — ould counthry isn’t fit for a pig to live in! Americay’s the place; you may bet your life on it, sorr!”

And suddenly it occurred to Hector that he might gain some information, even from this blathering fool. His thoughts had been running much on emigration during those lonely hours he had passed. If what he dreaded had really taken place, he would return no more to the lone moorlands and hills and lakes of Sutherlandshire. He would put the wide Atlantic between himself and certain memories. For him it would be ‘Soraidh slàn le tir mo ghraidh’—a long farewell to Fiunary!

But at present the Irishman would not be questioned; the outflowing of his eloquence was not to be stopped. He was now dealing with the various classes and the various institutions of Great Britain, on each of which he bestowed the same epithet—that of “bloody.” The Government, the newspaper editors, the House of Lords, the House of Commons, the clergy, the judges, the employers of labor, all were of the same ensanguined hue; and all were equally doomed to perdition, as soon as Ireland had taken up her proper and inevitable position in America. Moreover, the tall and silent Highlander, as he sat and gazed upon this frothing creature as if he were some strange phenomenon, some incomprehensible freak of nature, could not but see that the man was perfectly in earnest.

“Look what they did to John Mitchel! Look at that, now! John Mitchel!”

Hector had, unfortunately, never heard of John Mitchel, so he could not say anything.

“Dying by the road-side!—John Mitchel—to be left to die by the road-side! Think of that, now! What d’ye say to that, now? John Mitchel being left to die by the road-side!”

There were sudden tears in the deep-sunken gray eyes; and the Irishman made no concealment as he wiped them away with his red cotton handkerchief.

“Well, I’m very sorry,” Hector MacIntyre replied, in answer to this appeal, “whoever he was. But what could they have done for the poor man?”

“They could have given him a place,” the other retorted, with a sudden blaze of anger. “All that John Mitchel wanted was a place. But the” (ensanguined) “Government, would they do it? No, sorr! They let him die by the road-side!—John Mitchel—to die by the road-side!”

“Well, I am thinking,” said the forester slowly (as was his way when he had to talk in English), “that if the Government wass to give places to ahl them that would like a place, why, the whole

country would be in the public service, and there would be no one left to till the land. And do they give you a place when you go to America?"

"Aw, begob, sorr," said the Irishman, with a shrewd twinkle in his eye, "we get our share!"

Hector could not make out whether his new acquaintance had been to Portree to say good-by to some friends before he crossed the Atlantic, or whether he had been engaged in the crofter agitation which was then attracting attention in Skye. On this latter subject Paddy discoursed with a vehement volubility and a gay and audacious ignorance; but here Hector was on his own ground, and had to interfere.

"I am thinking you will not be knowing much about it," he observed, with a calm frankness. "The great Highland clearances, they were not made for deer at ahl, they were not made for sportsmen at ahl, they were made for sheep, as many a landlord knows to his cost this day, when he has the sheep farms on his lands and cannot get them let. And the deer forests, they are the worst land in a country where the best land is poor; and if they were to be cut up into crofts tomorrow, there is not one crofter in twenty would be able to earn his living, even if he was to get the croft for no rent at ahl. Oh, yes, I am as sorry as any one for the poor people when they increase in their families on such poor land; but what would be the use of giving them more peat hags and rocks? Can a man live where neither deer nor sheep nor black cattle can live; and even the deer come down in the winter and go wandering for miles in search of a blade of bent-grass?"

However, the Irishman would not accept these representations in any wise. He suspected this grave, brown-bearded Highlander of being an accomplice and hireling of the (ensanguined) landlords; and he might have gone on to denounce him, or even to provoke an appeal to fisticuffs (which would have been manifestly imprudent) had it not suddenly occurred to him that they might go down below and have a glass of whiskey together. Hector saw him disappear into the fore-cabin by himself, and was perhaps glad to be left alone.

Steadily the great steamer clove her way onward, by the islands of Raasay and Scalpa, through the narrows of Kyle Akin and Kyle Rhea, past the light-house and opening into Isle Ornsay, and down toward the wooded shores of Armadale. The day was fair and still; the sea was of an almost summer-like blue, with long swathes of silver calm; the sun shone on the lower green slopes that seemed so strangely voiceless, and on the higher peaks and shoulders of the hills, where every corrie and watercourse was a thread of azure among the ethereal rose-grays of the far-reaching summits. Even the wild Ardnamurchan ("The Headland of the Great Waves") had not a flake of cloud clinging to its beetled cliffs; and the long smooth roll that came in from the outer ocean was almost imperceptible. Toward evening the *Clansman* sailed into Oban Bay. The world seemed all on fire, so far as sea and sky were concerned; but Kerrera lay in shadow, a cold and livid green; while between the crimson water and the crimson heavens stood the distant mountains of Mull; and they had grown to be of a pale, clear, transparent rose-purple, so that they seemed a mere film thinner than any isinglass.

V

There was abundance of time for him to go ashore and make inquiries; but nothing had been heard of Flora Campbell since she had left. However, he managed to get the Greenock address of her sister, Mary Campbell, and with that in his possession he returned on board. Thereafter the monotonous voyage was resumed—away down by the long peninsula of Cantyre and round the Mull, up again through the estuary of the Clyde, until, at four o'clock on Friday afternoon, the

Clansman drew in to Greenock quay; and Hector MacIntyre knew that within a few minutes he would learn what fate had in store for him, for good or irretrievable ill.

He found his way to the address that had been given him—a temperance hotel at which Mary Campbell was head laundry-maid. But Mary Campbell was no longer there. She had been removed when she was taken ill; and as she would not go into a hospital, according to a prejudice familiar among many of her class, lodgings had been found for her. Thither Hector went forthwith, into a slummy by-street, where, after many inquiries, he found the “land” and the “close” that he sought. He ascended the grimy and dusky stone stairs. When he had nearly reached the top floor he was met by a short, stout, elderly man, who had just shut a door behind him.

“Is there one Mary Campbell luvvin’ here?” he made bold to ask in English.

“Ay, that there is,” said the stranger, fixing keen eyes on him. “Are you come for news of her? I am the doctor.”

“Yes, yes,” Hector said; but he could say no more; his heart was beating like to choke him. He fixed his eyes on the doctor’s face.

“Ye’ll be one of her Highland cousins, eh? Ye dinna look like a town-bred lad,” said the brusque and burly doctor, with a sort of facetious good-humor. “Well, well, Mary is getting on right enough. Ye might as well go in and cheer her up a bit. The twa lasses dinna seem to have many freens.”

“But—but—Flora?” said the forester, with his hungry, haggard eyes still watching every expression of the doctor’s face.

“The other one? Indeed, she has had the fever worse than her sister. I wasna sure one night but that she would go—”

MacIntyre seemed to hear no more. Flora was alive—was within a few yards of him. He stood there quite dazed. His eyes were averted; he was breathing heavily. The doctor looked at him for a moment or two.

“Maybe it’s the sister you’re anxious about?” said he, bluntly. “Weel, she is no out o’ the wood yet, but she has a fair chance. What, man, what’s the matter wi’ ye? It’s no such ill news

“No, no; it’s very good news,” Hector said, in an undertone, as if to himself. “I wass—fearing something. Can I see the lass? I wass not hearing from her for a while

But he could not explain what had brought him hither. He instinctively knew that this south countryman would laugh at his Highland superstition, would say that his head had been stuffed full of Hallowe’en nonsense, or that at most what he had imagined he had seen and the fact that Flora Campbell had fallen seriously ill formed but a mere coincidence.

“Oh, yes, you can see her,” the doctor said, with rough good-nature. “But I’ll just go in beforehand to gie her a bit warning. You can talk to her sister for a minute or two. She is sitting up noo, and soon she’ll have to begin and nurse her sister, as her sister did her until she took the fever. Come away, lad—what’s your name, did ye say?”

“Hector MacIntyre. Flora will know very well where I am from.”

The doctor knocked at the door, which was presently opened by a young girl; and while he left Hector to talk to the elder sister, who was lying propped up on a rude couch in a rather shabby little apartment, he himself went into an inner room. When he came out he again looked at Hector curiously.

“Now I understand why you were so anxious,” said he, with a familiar smile. “But how came ye to hear she was ill? She says she did not want ye to ken anything about it until she was on the high-road to getting better.”

Hector did not answer him. He only looked toward the door that had been partially left open.

“Go in, then,” said the doctor; “and dinna stay ower lang, my lad, for she has little strength to waste in talking as yet.”

Timidly, like a school-boy, this big strong man entered the sick-room; and it was gently and on tiptoe (lest his heavily nailed boots should make any noise) that he went forward to the bedside. Flora lay there pale and emaciated; but there was a smile of surprise and welcome in the dark blue Highland eyes; and she tried to lift her wasted hand to meet his. What they had to say to each other was said in the Gaelic tongue.

“It is sorry I am to see you like this,” said he, sitting down, and keeping her hand in his own. “But the doctor says you are now in a fair way to get better; and it is not from this town I am going until I take you with me, Flora, girl of my heart. The Sutherland air will be better for you than the Greenock air. And your sister Mary will come with you for a while; and both of you will take my little cottage; and Mrs. Matheson will give me a bed at Auchnaver Lodge. I am sure Mr. Lennox would not object to that.”

“But, Hector, how did you know that I was ill?” the sick girl said, and her eyes did not leave his eyes for a moment. “I was not wishing you to know I was ill—to give you trouble—until I could write to you that I better.”

“How did I know?” he answered gravely. “It was you yourself who came to tell me.”

“What is it that you say, Hector?” she asked, in some vague alarm.

“On Hallowe’en night,” he continued, in the same serious, simple tones, “I was at Inver-Mudal. Perhaps I was not caring much for the diversions of the lads and lasses. I walked up the road by myself; and there your wraith appeared to me as clear as I see you now. When I went back and told Mr. Murray, he said ‘Did she come forward to you, Hector, or did she go away? She is in great danger. It is a warning; and if she went away from you, you will see her no more; but if she came forward, she is getting better—you will see Flora again.’ I knew that myself; but I could not answer him; and my heart said to me that I must find out for myself; that I must go to seek you; and I set out that night and walked across the Reay Forest to Loch Inver, and caught the steamer there. What I have been thinking since I left Loch Inver until this hour I cannot tell to you or to any one living.”

“Hector,” she asked, “what night was Hallowe’en night? I have not been thinking of such things.”

“It was the night of Tuesday,” he answered.

“And that,” she said, in a low voice, “was the night that the fever took the turn. Mary told me they did not expect me to live till the morning.”

“We will never speak of it again, Flora,” said he, “for there are things that we do not understand.” And then he added: “But now that I am in Greenock, it is in Greenock I mean to remain until I can take you away with me, and Mary too; for Sutherland air is better than Greenock air for a Highland lass; and sure I am that Mr. Lennox will not grudge me having a bed at Auchnaver Lodge. And you will get familiar with the cottage, Flora, where I hope you will soon be mistress; and then there will be no more occasion for a great distance between you and me; or for the strange things that sometimes happen when people are separated the one from the other.”