

# Glenfinlas;

Or,

Lord Ronald's Coronach<sup>1</sup>

By Walter Scott

“For them the viewless forms of air obey,  
“Their bidding heed, and at their beck repair:  
“They know what spirit brews the stormful day,  
“And heartless oft, like moody madness, stare  
“To see the phantom train their secret work prepare.”

*Glenfinlas is a tract of forest ground lying in the Highlands of Perthshire, not far from Callender, in Menteith. To the west of the forest of Glenfinlas lies Loch Katrine, and its romantic avenue, called the Troshacks. Benledi, Benmore, and Benvoirlick, are mountains in the same district, and at no great distance from Glenfinlas. The river Teith passes Callender and the castle of Doune, and joins the Forth neat Stirling. The Pass of Lenny is immediately alone Callender, and is the principal access to the Highlands from that town. Glenartney is a forest near Benvoirlick. The whole forms a sublime tract of Alpine scenery.*

O hone a rie! O hone a rie!  
The pride of Albin's line is o'er,  
And fallen Glenartney's stateliest tree,—  
We ne'er shall see Lord Ronald more!

O, sprung from great Macgilliannore,  
The chief that never fear'd a foe,  
How matchless was thy broad claymore,  
How deadly thine unerring bow.

Well can the Saxon<sup>2</sup> widows tell  
How, on the Teith's resounding shore,  
The boldest Lowland warriors fell,  
As down from Lenny's Pass you bore.

But in his halls, on festal day,  
How blazed Lord Ronald's *beltane*<sup>3</sup> tree;  
While youths and maids the light strathspey  
So nimbly danced with Highland glee.

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<sup>1</sup> *Coronach* is the lamentation for a deceased warrior, sung by the aged of the clan. *O hone a ne* signifies—“Alms for the prince or chief.”

<sup>2</sup> The term Sassenach, or Saxon, is applied by the Highlander's to their Low-country neighbours.

<sup>3</sup> *Beltane-tree*; the fires lighted by the Highlanders on the first of May, in compliance with a custom derived from the Pagan times, are so called. It is a festival celebrated with various superstitious rites, both in the north of Scotland and in Wales.

Cheer'd by the strength of Ronald's shell,  
E'en age forgot his tresses hoar;  
But now the loud lament we swell,  
O ne'er to see Lord Ronald more!

From distant isles a chieftain came,  
The joys of Ronald's halls to find,  
And chase with him the dark-brown game  
That bounds o'er Albin's hills of wind.

'Twas Moy; whom in Columba's isle  
The Seer's prophetic spirit<sup>4</sup> found,  
As with a minstrel's fire the while  
He waked his harp's harmonious sound.

Full many a spell to him was known,  
Which wandering spirits shrink to hear,  
And many a lay of potent tone  
Was never meant for mortal ear.

For there, 'tis said, in mystic mood  
High converse with the dead they hold,  
And oft espy the fated shroud  
That shall the future corpse infold.

O so it fell, that on a day,  
To rouse the red deer from their den,  
The chiefs have ta'en their distant way,  
And scour'd the deep Glenfinlas glen.

No vassals wait their sports to aid,  
To watch their safety, deck their board,  
Their simple dress, the Highland plaid  
Their trusty guard, the Highland sword.

Three summer days, through brake and deli  
Their whistling shafts successful flew,  
And still, when dewy evening fell,  
The quarry to their hut they drew.

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<sup>4</sup> *Seer's spirit*. I can only describe the second sight, by adopting Dr. Johnson's definition, who calls it "An impression either by the mind upon the eye, or by the eye upon the mind, by which things distant and future are perceived and seen as if they were present." To which I would only add, that the spectral appearances thus presented, usually presage misfortune; that the faculty is painful to those who suppose they possess it; and that they usually acquire it while themselves under the pressure of melancholy.

In grey Glenfinlas' deepest nook  
The solitary cabin stood,  
Fast by Moneira's sullen brook,  
Which murmurs through that lonely wood.

Soft fell the night, the sky was calm,  
When three successive days had flown,  
And summer mist, in dewy balm,  
Steep'd heathy bank and mossy stone.

The moon, half hid in silvery flakes,  
Afar her dubious radiance shed,  
Quivering on Katrine's distant lakes,  
And resting on Benledi's head.

Now in their hut, in social guise,  
Their sylvan fare the chiefs enjoy,  
And pleasure laughs in Ronald's eyes,  
As many a pledge he quaffs to Moy.

—“What lack we here to crown our bliss,  
While thus the pulse of joy beats high,  
What but fair woman's yielding kiss,  
Her panting breath, and melting eye?

“To chase the deer of yonder shades,  
This morning left their father's pile  
“The fairest of our mountain maids,  
The daughters of the proud Glengyle.

Long have I sought sweet Mary's heart,  
“And dropp'd the tear, and heaved the sigh;  
“But vain the lover's wily art,  
“Beneath a sister's watchful eye.

“But thou may'st teach that guardian fair,  
“While far with Mary I am flown,  
“Of other hearts to cease her care,  
“And find it hard to guard her own.

“Touch but thy harp, thou soon shalt see  
“The lovely Flora of Glengyle,  
“Unmindful of her charge, and me,  
“Hang on thy notes 'twixt tear and smile.

“Or if she choose a melting tale,  
All underneath the greenwood bough,  
Will good St. Oran’s<sup>5</sup> rule prevail,  
Stern huntsman of the rigid brow?”—

—“Since Enrick’s fight, since Morna’s death,  
“No more on me shall rapture rise,  
“Responsive to the panting breath,  
“Or yielding kiss, or melting eyes.

“E’en then, when o’er the heath of woe,  
Where sunk my hopes of love and fame,  
I bade my harp’s wild wailings flow,  
On me the Seer’s sad spirit came.

“The last dread curse of angry heaven,  
“With ghastly sights, and sounds of woe,  
“To dash each glimpse of joy was given,  
“The gift, the future ill to know.

“The bark thou saw’st yon summer morn  
“So gaily part from Lulan’s bay,  
“My eye beheld her dash’d and torn  
“Far on the rocky Colensay.

“The Fergus too—thy sisters son,  
“Thou saw’st with pride the gallant’s power,  
“As, marching ’gainst the Laird of Downe,  
“He left the skirts of huge Benmore.

“Thou only saw’st his banners wave,  
“As down Benvoirlich’s side they wound,  
“Heard’st but the pibroch<sup>6</sup> answering brave  
“To many a target clanking round.

“I heard the groans, I mark’d the tears,  
“I saw the wound his bosom bore,  
“When on the serried Saxon spears  
“He pour’d his clan’s resistless roar.

“And thou who bidst me think of bliss,  
“And bidst my heart awake to glee,  
“And court, like thee, the wanton kiss,  
“That heart, O Ronald, bleeds for thee!

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<sup>5</sup> St. Oran was a friend and follower of St. Columbus, and was buried in Icolmkill.

<sup>6</sup> A piece of martial music adapted to the Highland bagpipes.

“I see the death damps chill thy brow,  
“I hear the warning spirit cry;  
“The corpse-lights dance—they’re gone, and now. . . .!  
“No more is given to gifted eye!”—

—“Alone enjoy thy dreary dreams,  
“Sad prophet of the evil hour;  
“Say, should we scorn joy’s transient beams,  
“Because to-morrow’s storm may lour?

“Or sooth, or false thy words of woe,  
“Clangillian’s chieftain ne’er shall fear;  
“His blood shall bound at rapture’s glow,  
“Though doom’d to stain the Saxon spear.

“E’en now, to meet me in yon dell,  
“My Mary’s buskins brush the dew;”—  
He spoke, nor bade the chief farewell,  
But call’d his dogs, and gay withdrew.

Within an hour return’d each hound,  
In rush’d the rouzers of the deer;  
They howl’d in melancholy sound,  
Then closely couch’d beside the Seer.

No Ronald yet—though midnight came,  
And sad were Moy’s prophetic dreams,  
As bending oer the dying flame  
He fed the watch-fire’s quivering gleams.

Sudden the hounds erect their ears,  
And sudden cease their moaning howl;  
Close press’d to Moy, they mark their fears  
By shivering limbs, and stifled growl.

Untouch’d the harp began to ring,  
As softly, slowly, oped the thoor,  
And shook responsive every string,  
As light a footstep press’d the floor.

And by the watch-fire’s glimmering light,  
Close by the min’strel’s side was seen  
An huntress maid, in beauty bright,  
All dropping wet her robes of green

All dropping wet her garments seem,  
Chill'd was her cheek, her bosom bare,  
As bending o'er the dying gleam,  
She wrung the moisture from her hair.

With maiden blush she softly said,  
—“O gentle huntsman, hast thou seen,  
“In deep Glenfinlas' moon-light glade,  
“A lovely maid in vest of green:

“With her a chief in Highland pride,  
“His shoulders bear the hunter's bow  
“The mountain dirk adorns his side,  
“Far on the wind his tartans flow?”—

—“And who art thou; and who are they?”  
All ghastly gazing, Moy replied;  
“And why, beneath the moon's pale ray,  
“Dare ye thus roam Glenfinlas' side?”—

—“Where wild Loch Katrine pours her tide  
“Blue, dark, and deep, round many an isle,  
“Our father's towers o'erhang her side,  
“The castle of the bold Glengyle.

“To chase the dun Glenfinlas deer,  
“Our woodland course this morn we bore,  
“And haply met, while wandering here,  
“The son of great Macgilliannore.

“O aid me then to seek the pair,  
“Whom loitering in the woods I lost;  
“Alone I dare not venture there,  
“Where walks, they say, the shrieking ghost”—

—“Yes, many a shrieking ghost walks there;  
“Then first, my own sad vow to keep,  
“Here will I pour my midnight prayer,  
“Which still must rise when mortals sleep.”—

—“O first, for pity's gentle sake,  
“Guide a lone wanderer on her way,  
“For I must cross the haunted brake,  
“And reach my father's towers ere day.”~

—“First three times tell each Ave-bead,  
“And thrice a Pater-noster say,  
“Then kiss with me the holy reed,  
“So shall we safely wind our way.”—

—“O shame to knighthood strange and foul!  
“Go doff the bonnet from thy brow,  
“And shroud thee in the monkish cowl,  
“Which best befits thy sullen vow.

“Not so, by high Dunlathmon’s fire,  
“Thy heart was froze to faith and joy,  
“Then gaily rung thy raptured lyre,  
“To wanton Morna’s melting eye.”—

Wild stared the Minstrel’s eyes of flame,  
And high his sable locks arose,  
And quick his colour went and came,  
As fear and rage alternate rose.

—“And thou! when by the blazing oak  
“I lay to her and love resign’d,  
“Say, rode ye on the eddying smoke,  
“Or sail’d ye on the midnight wind

“Not thine a race of mortal blood,  
“Nor old Glengyle’s pretended line;  
“Thy dame, the Lady of the Flood,  
“Thy sire, the Monarch of the Mine.”—

He mutter’d thrice St. Oran’s rhyme,  
And thrice St. Fillan’s powerful prayer,  
Then turn’d him to the Eastern clime,  
And sternly shook his coal-black hair;

And bending o’er his harp, he flung  
His wildest witch-notes on the wind,  
And loud, and high, and strange they rung,  
As many a magic change they find.

Tall wax’d the Spirit’s altering form,  
Till to the roof her stature grew,  
Then mingling with the rising storm,  
With one wild yell away she flew.

Rain beats, hail rattles, whirlwinds tear,  
The slender hut in fragments flew,  
But not a lock of Moy's loose hair,  
Was waved by wind, or wet by dew.

Wild mingling with the howling gale,  
Loud bursts of ghastly laughter rise,  
High o'er the Minstrel's head they sail,  
And die amid the northern skies.

The voice of thunder shook the wood,  
As ceased the more than mortal yell,  
And spattering foul a shower of blood,  
Upon the hissing firebrands fell.

Next dropp'd from high a mangled arm,  
The fingers strain'd an half-drawn blade:  
And last, the life-blood streaming warm,  
Torn from the trunk, a gasping head.

Oft o'er that head in battling field,  
Stream'd the proud crest of high Benmore  
That arm the broad claymore could wield,  
Wich dyed the Teith with Saxon gore.

Woe to Moneira's sullen rills!  
Woe to Glenfinlas' dreary glen!  
There never son of Albin's hills  
Shall draw the hunter's shaft agen!

E'en the tired pilgrim's burning feet  
At noon shall shun that sheltering den,  
Lest, journeying in their rage, he meet  
The wayward Ladies of the Glen.

And we—behind the chieftain's shield  
No more shall we in safety dwell;  
None leads the people to the field—  
And we the loud lament must swell.

O hone a rie! O hone a rie!  
The pride of Albin's line is o'er;  
And fallen Glenartney's stateliest tree,  
We ne'er shall see Lord Ronald more!

The simple tradition upon which the preceding stanzas are founded, runs as follows. While two Highland hunters were passing the night in a solitary bathy (a hut built for the purpose of hunting,) and making merry over their

venison and whisky, one of them expressed a wish that they had pretty lasses to complete their party. The words were scarcely uttered, when two beautiful young women, habited in green, entered the hut, dancing and singing. One of the hunters was seduced by the syren who attached herself particularly to him, to leave the hut: the other remained, and, suspicious of the fair seducers, continued to play upon a trump, or Jew's harp, some strain consecrated to the Virgin Mary. Day at length came, and the temptress vanished. Searching in the forest, he found the bones of his unfortunate friend, who had been torn to pieces and devoured by the Fiend into whose toils he had fallen. The place was, from thence, called the Glen of the Green Women.