

THE MAID OF KILLENA.

BY WILLIAM BLACK.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME FESTIVITIES.

So the time went by, and Ailasa Macdonald marked it no longer by the recurrent seasons, nor yet by the going away of the men to the Cathness fishery, but by the letters she got from Alister Lewis in Glasgow.

"But I had seen Ailasa herself, and she was showing me the letter," said Nicol Lewis to his eldest brother, who was angrily expressing his disbelief in the news.

"And it is very well that he cannot write to his own people, but to a stranger less than has nothing to do with him," Duncan Lewis said, gloomily smoking his pipe.

"And who will the young man write to, if not to the lass he is going to marry?" said Nicol Lewis.

"It is a very sure man you are, Nicol Lewis; but you are too sure of that," said the other, rising and going away, with a dark look on his face.

"It will be a bad glass you will drink when Alister marries Mrs. Macdonald's lass—a bad glass for her, and for you, and for him."

Nicol paid no heed to the words at the time; for indeed, he had grown accustomed to hear his eldest brother talk in a strange fashion about Alister and Ailasa Macdonald.

Meanwhile, however, there was nothing but joy and the hurry of preparation throughout the islands of Darroch and Killeena—and throughout one or two neighboring islands besides—for everyone knew he would be asked to the wedding, and they were all busy in making up useful presents for Ailasa, and in sending to distant parts for the best whisky that could be got, just in case the bridal procession might come their way.

Then Alister Lewis came back to his native place to claim his bride; and he was more than overcome with wonder and delight at the beauty of her bright and tender face; and he was vastly pleased to see how smartly she was dressed; while she, trembling, proud and glad, dared hardly to speak to him lest he should think she had not as yet quite mastered the good English.

bers of the company—mostly married men and women—kept up the dancing with many a wild shout and hurra, even until the day appeared in the east and the sun began to shine out over the sea.

No one noticed that Duncan Lewis had absented himself from this gathering—no one but Alister, who was surprised and grieved. Next day Alister went to Ailasa and said—

"Ailasa, did you know that my brother Duncan was not among the people last night?"

"I did not know it, Alister," she said. "It is something hard he is thinking of us, Ailasa," her lover said. "Now there is no one who can win over a man like a young lass; and if you would go to my brother Duncan you would learn what he is thinking about, and he would be friendly with us again."

"Oh, Alister, I cannot go to your brother Duncan," the girl said, almost with a look of alarm.

"But why will you not go?" her lover said, startled by her look.

"I hope it is no secret you have from me, Ailasa," said he, reproachfully.

"If it is a secret you have, said he, 'I will not take it from you.' She hesitated for a moment, and regarded him with an appealing look, then, finding nothing in his face but disappointment and sadness, she suddenly exclaimed—

"I cannot help you quarrel with me, Alister, and just before our wedding-day. There was a secret—but—there is no wrong in it—it was that your brother Duncan had asked me a few years ago to marry him—that was all. And now you know why I cannot go to him with the message."

"My brother Duncan!" the young man said, profoundly surprised, and yet finding in the circumstances an explanation of much in his brother's conduct toward himself. "And he is angry with you that you would not marry him, Ailasa?"

had their own piper was at Darroch. About ten o'clock these parties landed at different points on the great island adjoining—the main-land it was generally considered—and proceeded by convenient routes across the moor toward a certain small inn where the ceremony was to take place.

It was a beautiful morning—the air was sweet with the resinous gale blowing in the marshes, the sun shone brightly on the blue sea all around the islands. The people walked in couples, the piper at their head marching with his pipe at its highest pitch, and playing his most gladsome tunes. As they passed the solitary farms, the old and withered people came out to watch them with beamed eyes, and give the young man a good wish; some would have had him take a glass for good luck, and he thanked them in such fine English, and he looked so handsome in his smart Glasgow clothes, that he quite won the old women's hearts.

Just before the inn was reached a wild cry of alarm was raised. Was not that the bride's party—a thin, bright line of color far over the moor-land? They could hear the faint sound of the pipes—it was Ailasa's party, sure enough, and shame would fall on the young man if she and her friends should reach the place of appointment first.

"By Kott," cried Nicol Lewis to the company behind him, "it is you old ones, you can stay behind if you will; but Alister and me, we will be a run to the inn: as sure as I am alive we will not let Mrs. Macdonald's friends be first at the inn."

And they would have rushed on by themselves, but the piper saw a dreadful oath that the bridegroom should not go to meet his bride unheralded by music, and the old man set out running too; whereupon all the people followed him, with wild shouting, and laughing, and helping of the elder folks, until, sure enough, they were at the inn first, the old piper recovering his breath sufficiently to be playing a splendid strain when the young bride and all her people arrived.

There was a great greeting of friends, and everyone was looking at Ailasa, and her fine clothes that had come from Stormoway. Then she came forward to shake hands with them all; and most especially she came forward to Duncan Lewis, and held out her hand. Alister Lewis had asked her to make friends with his brother, since he was coming to the marriage.

"And it is very glad I am to see you, this day, Duncan Lewis," the young girl, said, shyly.

"Oh, ay," said he, looking at her so that she turned her eyes away; "a young lass is very glad to see any one on her wedding-day. It is a very good for a young lass, the wedding-day. This was all he said to her, and presently they went into the inn, the central room of which had been cleared; and there way a great noise of talking, and a calling for glasses of whisky and pieces of bread-and-cheese, until the news went round that the minister had come. Then a hush fell over the assembly, and Ailasa standing near to Alister Lewis, began to look frightened. The minister came in like a room—a small, thin, white-haired, kindly-looking man, who looked as though he had been a fisherman in his youth. There was a small circle cleared in the crowd, and then the ceremony began. It was all in Gaelic, for there were many old people who did not know much English; and some of these old cronies may have thought the exhortation exceedingly long, but at length it was all over, and then the minister shook hands with the newly-married pair, and drank to their health a glass of whisky, which Nicol Lewis, with great courtesy, brought in on a plate. Then the pipes struck up outside, and the people dropped out to the dancing, while the old woman of the inn and her daughters began to arrange the tables again, so that the guests might have something to eat by-and-by.

The great festivity, however, was to be held at Hector Lewis's house in Darroch that evening, after the wedding; and the young people were to go over to Carn-Sleat, where Alister Lewis proposed to remain for a few days until the cottage attached to the schoolhouse of Maol-beg was finished and ready for them. So the people did not stay long at the inn. Shortly after midnight, both parties joined into one great company, and both the pipers now led the way, the bride and bridegroom immediately following. And now the old folks who came out to greet them had something to gladden their eyes with, for here was the bride as well; and it was a great favor if she would go in along with her husband to sit down by the hearth for a few minutes, while the company outside formed itself into eights, and danced reels and strathspeys with unabated vigor. In this fashion they got down to the sea again; and here all the boats along these lonely shores had been brought together to take them across—all except Mrs. Macdonald's small rowing-boat, which had been left at the other side of Darroch to ferry the young people at night over to Killeena.

"Then, by Kott," said Duncan Lewis with a flash of anger in his eyes, "I will come to your wedding. It was yourself, Alister Lewis, that asked me to come to the wedding. And if I had no ferry fine clothes to give the lass and I am not good at the dancing—well, that is no matter, for there are many more who will be very glad over the wedding. But oh, yes, I will be at the wedding. Alister—you can tell Mrs. Macdonald's lass I will be at the wedding."

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