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Proposal on the Highlands
A Response to Walter Scott’s Waverley

Adam Brown

The drawing-room was occupied
By Flora and her guest.
They talked of many minor things,
Mere pleasantries at best.

And from the many books they’d read
In comfort did they quote,
But soon the conversation took
A much more weighty note.

With sudden exaltation did
The Englishman pronounce,
‘My love for you burns ever strong,
Our union let’s announce.

‘O Flora – to you none compare!
Do heal my fev’rish heart.
No fatal bar precludes our joy,
Our future let us start!’

‘Now hush, dear sir!’ did Flora say,
‘Take hold of sense anew.
For countless reasons you must know
I cannot marry you.’

‘I barely know thee, that is true
But yet I know this much:
Together we would happy be’,
And then her hand he clutched.

‘I feel obliged to let you know
I’ve never met the man
Whom I could love forever more’,
And she withdrew her hand.
'But give me time,' he did persist,  
'And let your brother speak.  
The great alliance it would make  
Is something he will seek.'

Then Fergus burst into the room  
With broadened sword in hand.  
'Come Waverley,' his deep voice boomed,  
'We are to make a stand.'

And Flora looked upon her kin  
With fear and awe combined.  
His hair appeared to blaze with light  
And in his eyes sparks shined.

Much battle planning coursed his brain,  
His features were on fire.  
This man who was an awesome sight,  
Much terror did inspire.

The Chieftain's tempers were well known,  
To Flora best of all.  
Like storms that tear across the sky,  
The treetops they would maul.

So Flora did not dare to ask  
A moment more of peace,  
For Fergus seldom from his thoughts  
Would his attention cease.

And there he stood with dirk in hand,  
His steel-wrought pistol lashed  
Upon his blood-stained kilt much worn  
Through battles he had dashed.

His trembling feathered-bonnet sat  
Upon his searing head.  
A premonition crossed her mind  
Of Fergus dryly bled.
That death their future path could be
   Had always been a chance.
The cause she was devoted to
   Could hasten Satan's dance.

Her fears she'd pondered night and day
   But faithful she remained.
Much Highland blood would wash the fields
   Before Charles Edward reigned.

'We must prepare,' the Chieftain said,
   'Come see the men who wait,
Three hundred broadswords have arrived
   An army they will make.'

Then Flora turned to Waverley
   And said with soothing voice,
'My answer I will give to thee
   With reasons for my choice.

'By waterfall we both shall meet
   Before the end of day,'
And with those words did Fergus lead
   The Englishman away.

Then Flora chose to leave the room
   And make her way outside.
She wandered past two verging brooks
   Whose waters did collide.

As desp'rate feelings racked her mind,
   The eddies in the stream
Increased their width and sheer tumult;
   The water ceased to gleam.

Above, the sky grew ever dark,
   The clouds attacked the light;
Below, the rocks of varied shape
   Did make a ghastly sight.
Her thoughts were wild as the brook
   That gurgled at her side,
The wind so chill it lashed her face
   And slowed her lonely stride.

The path did shrink as on she went,
   The walls on both sides closed,
Her pitch-black curls were caught by trees,
   The singing birds all dozed.

She passed below the rustic bridge
   On which she often walked,
But trav'ling underneath it now
   She felt a victim stalked.

The path's ascent from stream's near edge
   She struggled to surmount,
The slipp'ry earth floor did impede
   Her quest towards the fount.

And finally she reached the place
   Where she so often went,
But pleasure once afforded her
   Now seemed to be all spent.

Her mind debated with itself
   Upon the nearing choice.
Her future rested fully on
   The words spoke by her voice.

A gentleman was Waverley,
   She was quite sure of that.
But no love rocked her soul for him;
   The most important fact.

Her pure conviction had remained
   From birth to adulthood,
To see the Chevalier enthroned
   To stand for right and good.
And to this end, she would do all,
Leave ev'rything behind,
To help bring justice to the land,
And see the Prince enshrined.

She could not marry Waverley,
It was absurd to ask.
What prospect of success was there
With the oncoming task?

Or how could she leave Scotland
In such important times?
To run to English safety would
Be worst among all crimes.

Her father had pursued the cause
To which she was entwined.
And to the princess of her youth
Her soul was duly signed.

The Englishman then did approach,
He walked into the glade.
She rose to meet him by the spring
Amongst the dark'ning shade.

'I must tell you, after much thought,
My mind is now resolved.
Your kind offer I must refuse,
My faith is too involved.'

'But how, please tell, is our wedlock
In conflict with your cause.
My family's support could help —'
But pained, he had to pause.

'I note that I distress you much
And for this I do grieve
But I dare say of my strong faith
Your mind cannot conceive.'
'What love you're owed I cannot give,  
Mine heart cannot provide.  
Your life would be far from complete  
If I was by your side.  

'You must take hold of reason  
And you will see I'm right.  
Your love is far from permanent  
And will fade in the night.'  

When Waverley found no reply,  
She ended her address:  
'Next only to the Stuart cause,  
I wish your happiness.'  

With that did Flora halt her speech  
And left him in dismay.  
The sun came out to light her path  
As Flora walked away.