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Lady's Rock by Patsy Dyer

The Mill of Coille Bhar is today just a ruin of stones but in its hey day it was one of Knapdale's boasts - the fish cruives of Crinan, the deer forest of Bacan's Glen and the dark mill of Coille Bhar. And the mill itself saw part of a very dark story one day, itself.

Several hundred years ago Lady Elizabeth Campbell married Lachlan Cattnach MacLean of Mull. It may have been a marriage of political convenience, as many were those days, where clans were vying for power and land and it was probably hoped that the marriage between the Campbells and the MacLeans would result in a very strong union. Whether they married for love or not, it is not known but it became quite obvious that Lady Elizabeth and her husband were not happy. Some say that on more than one occasion, Lady Elizabeth had tried to murder her husband by poison. Other stories say that she was jealous by a romantic reunion that he had had with a woman onboard one of the Spanish Armada ships and that Elizabeth had made the ship blow up with the woman on board. Other stories say that Lachlan had been involved in an uprising with MacDonald of Lochalsh who wanted to become Lord of the Isles. And Lady Elizabeth's brother had found out and had put a stop to the uprising. That would have resulted in quite sour relationships in the family no doubt. And another story is that Lady Elizabeth was unable to bear an heir to Lachlan. Whatever the cause, we do not know but one night we are sure, Lachlan

Cattanach went to the tallest tower of the Castle of Duart and sat working out how he could get rid of his wife.

One dark night, the poor woman was taken from the castle, bound hand and foot and thrown into a boat which was taken into the Mull, the Sound of Mull. There was a rock that Cattanach knew of, that at full tide would be covered in water and that was where the poor lady was cast. We can only hope that the men took pity on her and took from her hands and her feet the bounds.

Well, her screams would not have been heard above the sound of the waves crashing on the rocks and the seagulls crying. And they left and returned back to the castle. And there Lachlan told everyone how distressed he was that his poor dear wife had somehow been cast overboard and although he and his men had spent many hours searching for her with their lamps held aloft and filled with the precious whale oil, she was not found.

He then sent two men down to Inverary to tell Elizabeth's brother, Colin, Earl of Argyll, that his sister was lost and then Lachlan set about a mock funeral even though there was no body to be buried.

Next morning, as the sun just began to arise over the water, a small fishing boat could be seen filled with a very fine catch of herring. And on board were fishermen from Coille Bhar Mill and perhaps Kilmory Oib as well. And they saw a woman standing on the rock and waving her arms at them as the waves crashed over her, the water already past her knees. They quickly moved the boat towards the rock, very carefully so the boat was not splintered against the rock. They took the woman on board and just before she fainted, she told them who she was. They wrapped her carefully in linen cloth that had been soaked in linseed

oil, to protect her from the seawater and took her down to their mill at Coille Bhar, knowing that Inverary was far too far and that she needed help. She was taken off the boat and given warm dry clothing, hot porridge and warm goats milk. And the men, they conducted their business at the mill - fish for oatmeal and barley. When Lady Elizabeth was ready, she set sail again with the fisherman and they took her down to Inverary where she immediately left the boat and went to the castle to seek her brother.

The next morning, the two messengers arrived from Mull to tell Colin that his sister had unfortunately been killed, cast overboard and not found. What a surprise and what a great amount of fear they must have felt when they walked into the room and saw Elizabeth sitting at the high table with her brother. The Campbell's anger was ready to erupt but they had been told to cap it. Such is politics. They say that it was nearly two years before he got his just desserts.

One day Elizabeth's brother, John of Cawdor, was in Edinburgh and he discovered his enemy Lachlan Cattanach MacLean was there also. One night, he followed Lachlan back to his lodgings and there as the man lay in his bed, he was stabbed to death with his own dirk.

A suitable ending to a very wicked man, some may say. The rock where Lady Elizabeth had been cast, you can still see today and is called Lady's Rock, just south of Lismore island. And what of the fishermen of Coille Bhar Mill? Lady Elizabeth was so delighted and grateful for the help and assistance they had given her in her time of need that she gave them the mill and all that went with it.

This is the transcript of the audio file available at
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