



Cornell University Library

BOUGHT WITH THE INCOME
FROM THE

SAGE ENDOWMENT FUND

THE GIFT OF

Henry W. Sage

1891

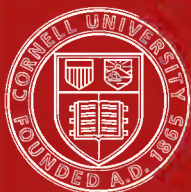
A.263377

18/17/12

CORNELL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



3 1924 064 991 809



Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

The Works of
"FIONA MACLEOD"

UNIFORM EDITION

ARRANGED BY
MRS. WILLIAM SHARP

VOLUME III

“ L'homme a voulu rêver, le rêve gouvernera l'homme ”

LE THÉÂTRE DE SÉRAPHIN



From the original by L. W. Garrison

The Freshwater Islands

THE
DOMINION OF DREAMS
—
UNDER THE DARK STAR
—

BY
"FIONA MACLEOD"
(WILLIAM SHARP)



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1910

THE TROW PRESS, NEW YORK

TO
EILIDH
THIS BOOK OF DREAMS
THAT ARE REALITIES

"The song is the bird's self: and the song and its inspiration are one. . . A bird flies past me, out of the west: I ask the fugitive, Is it with my love as of yore? I ask, in turn, the drifting cloud, the wind. . . . You ask of me a song: of me, who am but the lyre. Ask it of Love, my dear one: it is he who is the poet."

From the Magyar.

"Who is it, therefore, that will speak of the visible such as it is? He who sees it."

PLÖTINUS.

. *For I have seen*
In lonely places, and in lonelier hours,
My vision of the rainbow-aureoled face
Of her whom men name Beauty: proud, austere:
Dim vision of the far immortal Face,
Divinely fugitive, that haunts the world,
And lifts man's spiral thought to lovelier dreams.

CONTENTS

THE DOMINION OF DREAMS

I

	PAGE
DALUA	3
BY THE YELLOW MOONROCK	12
LOST	35
MORAG OF THE GLEN	43
THE SIGHT	86
THE DARK HOUR OF FERGUS	90
THE HILLS OF RUEL	99
THE ARCHER	104
THE BIRDEEN	123

II

THE BOOK OF THE OPAL	139
THE WELLS OF PEACE	148
IN THE SHADOW OF THE HILLS	160
THE DISTANT COUNTRY	166
A MEMORY OF BEAUTY	180
ENYA OF THE DARK EYES	184
THE CRYING OF WIND	192
HONEY OF THE WILD BEES	199

Contents

	PAGE
THE BIRDS OF EMAR	216
ULAD OF THE DREAMS	234

EPILOGUE

THE WIND, THE SHADOW, AND THE SOUL	283
----------------------------------------------	-----

UNDER THE DARK STAR

THE ANOINTED MAN	291
THE DÀN-NAN-RÒN	299
GREEN BRANCHES	345
CHILDREN OF THE DARK STAR	370
ALASDAIR THE PROUD	395
THE AMADAN	414
NOTE TO FIRST EDITION	425
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE	427
By MRS. WILLIAM SHARP	

THE DOMINION OF
DREAMS

*'I have seen all things pass and all men go
Under the shadow of the drifting leaf.'*

(The Immortal Hour.)

*Only to gods in heaven
Comes no old age or death of anything;
All else is turmoiled by our master Time.
The earth's strength fades and manhood's glory fades,
Faith dies, and unfaith blossoms like a flower.
And who shall find in the open streets of men,
Or secret places of his own heart's love,
One wind blow true for ever. . . .'*

SOPHOCLES: *Œdipus at Colonus.*

*'A dream about a shadow is man: yet when
some God-given splendour falls, a glory of light
comes over him, and his life is sweet.'*

PINDAR.

The Dominion of Dreams

DALUA ¹

I have heard you calling, Dalua,
Dalua!

I have heard you on the hill,
By the pool-side still,
Where the lapwings shrill
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua!

What is it you call, Dalua,
Dalua!
When the rains fall,
When the mists crawl,
And the curlews call
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua!

*I am the Fool, Dalua,
Dalua!
When men hear me, their eyes
Darken: the shadow in the skies
Droops: and the keening-woman cries
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua!*

¹ Dalua, one of the names of a mysterious being in the Celtic mythology, the *Amadan-Dhu*, the Dark Witless One, or Fairy Fool.

One night when Dan Macara was going over the hillside of Ben Breacan, he saw a tall man playing the pipes, and before him a great flock of sheep.

It was a night of the falling mist that makes a thin soundless rain. But behind the blurr was a rainpool of light, a pool that oozed into a wan flood; and so Macara knew that the moon was up and was riding against the drift, and would pull the rain away from the hill.

Even in slow rain, with damp moss or soaking heather, sheep do not go silently. Macara wondered if they were all young rams, that there was not a crying *uan* or a bleating ewe to be heard. "By the Black Stone of Iona," he muttered, "there is not even a broken *oisg* among them."

True, there was a faint rising and falling *méh-ing* high in the darkness of the hillside; but that melancholy sound as of lost children crying, was confused with the rustling of many leaves of ash and birch, with eddies of air through the heather and among the fronds of the bracken, and with the uncertain hum of trickling waters. No one utterance slid cleanly through the gloom, but only the voice of darkness as it speaks among the rainy hills.

As he stumbled along the path, stony and

rain-gutted, but held together by the tough heather-fibres, he thought of the comfortable room he had left in the farmhouse of Pàdruig and Mary Macrae, where the very shadows were so warm, and the hot milk and whisky had been so comfortable too; and warm and comfortable both, the good friendly words of Pàdruig and Mary.

He wiped the rain from his wet lips, and smiled as he remembered Mary's words: "You, now, so tall and big, an' ill-looking at that, for a dark Macara . . . and yet with no woman to your side! . . . an' you with the thirty years on you! . . . for sure I would have shame in going through the Strath, with the girls knowing that!" But just then he heard the broken notes of the feadan, or "chanter," that came from the tall man playing the pipes, with the great flock of sheep before him. It was like the flight of pee-wits, all this way and that.

"What with the dark and the rain and the whisky and the good words of Mhairi Bàn, my head's like a black bog," he muttered; "and the playing of that man there is like the way o' voices in the bog."

Then he heard without the wilderness in his ears. The air came faint but clear. It angered him. It was like a mocking voice.

Perhaps this was because it was like a mocking voice. Perhaps because it was the old pipe-song, "Oighean bhoidheach, slan leibh!" "Ye pretty maids, farewell!" "Who will he be?" he wondered sullenly. "If it's Peter Macandrew, Ardmoré's shepherd, I'll play him a tune behind the wind that he won't like."

Then the tall man suddenly changed his chanter-music, and the wet night was full of a wild, forlorn, beautiful air.

Dan Macara had never heard that playing before, and he did not like it. Once, when he was a child, he had heard his mother tell Alan Dall, a blind piper of the Catanach, to stop an air that he was playing, because it had sobs and tears in it. He moved swiftly now to overtake the man with the flock of sheep. His playing was like Alan Dall's. He wanted, too, to ask him who he was, and whose chanter-magic he had, and where he was going (and the hill way at that!) with all those sheep.

But it took him a long time to get near. He ran at last, but he got no nearer. "*Gu ma h-olc dhut . . .* ill befall thee," he cried angrily after a time; "go your own way, and may the night swallow you and your flock."

And with that, Dan Macara turned to follow the burnside-way again.

But once more the tall man with the flock

of sheep changed the air that he was playing. Macara stopped and listened. It was sweet to hear. Was this a sudden magic that was played upon him? Had not the rain abruptly ceased, as a breath withdrawn? He stared confusedly: for sure, there was no rain, and moonlight lay upon the fern and upon a white birch that stood solitary in that white-green waste. The sprays of the birch were like a rain of pale shimmering gold. A bird slid along a topmost branch; blue, with breast like a white iris, and with wild-rose wings. Macara could see its eyes a-shine, two little starry flames. Song came from it, slow, broken, like water in a stony channel. With each note the years of Time ran laughing through ancient woods, and old age sighed across the world and sank into the earth, and the sea moaned with the burden of all moaning and all tears. The stars moved in a jocund measure; a player sat among them and played, the moon his footstool and the sun a flaming gem above his brows. The song was Youth.

Dan Macara stood. Dreams and visions ran past him, laughing, with starry eyes.

He closed his own eyes, trembling. When he opened them he saw no bird. The grey blurr of the rain came through the darkness.

The cold green smell of the bog-myrtle filled the night.

But he was close to the shepherd now. Where had he heard that air? It was one of those old fonnnsheen, for sure: yes, "A Choill teach Úrair," "The Green Woodland" . . . that was it. But he had never heard it played like that.

The man did not look round as Dan Macara drew near. The pipes were shadowy black, and had long black streamers from them. The man wore a Highland bonnet, with a black plume hanging from it.

The wet slurred moonshine came out as the rain ceased. Dan looked over the shoulder of the man at the long, straggling crowd of sheep.

He saw then that they were only a flock of shadows.

They were of all shapes and sizes; and Macara knew, without knowing how he knew, that they were the shadows of all that the shepherd had found in his day's wandering—from the shadows of tall pines to the shadows of daisies, from the shadows of horned cattle to the shadows of fawns and field mice, from the shadow of a woman at a well to that of a wild rose trailing on the roadside, from the shadow of a dead man in a corrie, and of a

Dalua

boy playing on a reed with three holes, and the shadows of flying birds and drifting clouds, and the slow, formless shadows of stones, to (as he saw with a sudden terror) the shadow of Dan Macara himself, idly decked with feather-like bracken, where he had lost it an hour ago in the darkness, when he had first heard the far-off broken lilt of the pipes.

Filled with an anger that was greater than his terror, Dan Macara ran forward, and strove to grasp the man by the shoulder; but with a crash he came against a great slab of granite, with its lichened sides wet and slippery with the hill mist. As he fell, he struck his head and screamed. Before silence and darkness closed in upon him like two waves, he heard Dalua's mocking laughter far up among the hills, and saw a great flock of curlews rise from where the shadows had been.

When he woke there was no more mist on the hill. The moonlight turned the raindrops on the bracken into infinite little wells of light.

All night he wandered, looking for the curlew that was his shadow.

Toward the edge of day he lay down. Sleep was on him, soft and quiet as the breast-feather of a mothering bird. His head was in a tuft of grass; above it a moist star hung, a white solitude—a silent solitude.

Dalua

Dalua stood by him, brooding darkly. He was no shepherd now, but had cloudy black hair like the thin shadows of branches at dusk, and wild eyes, obscure as the brown-black tarns in the heather.

He looked at the star, smiling darkly. Then it moved against the dawn, and paled. It was no more. The man lay solitary.

It was the gloaming of the dawn. Many shadows stirred. Dalua lifted one. It was the shadow of a reed. He put it to his mouth and played upon it.

Above, in the greying waste, a bird wheeled this way and that. Then the curlew flew down, and stood quivering, with eyes wild as Dalua's. He looked at it, and played it into a shadow; and looked at the sleeping man, and played that shadow into his sleeping mind.

"There is your shadow for you," he said, and touched Dan.

At that touch Macara shivered all over. Then he woke with a laugh. He saw the dawn sliding along the tops of the pines on the east slope of Ben Breacan.

He rose. He threw his cromak away. Then he gave three wails of the wailing cry of the curlew, and wandered idly back by the way he had come.

It was years and years after that when I saw him.

“How did this madness come upon him?” I asked; for I recalled him strong and proud.

“The Dark Fool, the Amadan-Dhu, touched him. No one knows any more than that. But that is a true thing.”

He hated or feared nothing, save only shadows. These disquieted him, by the hearthside or upon the great lonely moors. He was quiet, and loved running water and the hill-wind. But, at times, the wailing of curlews threw him into a frenzy.

I asked him once why he was so sad. “I have heard,” he said . . . and then stared idly at me; adding suddenly, as though remembering words spoken by another:—“I’m always hearing the three old ancientest cries: the cry of the curlew, an’ the wind, an’ the sighin’ of the sea.”

He was ever witless, and loved wandering among the hills. No child feared him. He had a lost love in his face. At night, on the sighing moors, or on the glen-road, his eyes were like stars in a pool, but with a light more tender.

BY THE YELLOW MOONROCK

Rory MacAlpine the piper had come down the Strath on St. Bride's Eve, for the great wedding at the farm of his kinsman Donald Macalister. Every man and woman, every boy and girl, who could by hook or by crook get to the big dance at the barns was to be seen there: but no one that danced till he or she could dance no more had a wearier joy than Rory with the pipes. Reels and strathspeys that everyone knew gave way at last to wilder strathspeys that no one had ever heard before . . . and why should they, since it was the hill-wind and the mountain-torrent and the roar of pines that had got loose in Rory's mind, and he not knowing it any more than a leaf that sails on the yellow wind.

He played with magic and pleasure, and had never looked handsomer, in his new grandeur of clothes, and with his ruddy hair aflame in the torchlight, and his big blue eyes shining as with a lifting, shifting fire. But those who knew him best saw that he was strangely subdued for Rory MacAlpine, or at

least, that he laughed and shouted (in the rare intervals when he was not playing, and there were two other pipers present to help the Master) more by custom than from the heart.

“What is't, Rory?” said Dalibrog to him, after a heavy reel wherein he had nearly killed a man by swinging upon and nigh flattening him against the wall.

“Nothing, foster-brother dear; it's just nothing at all. Fling away, Dalibrog; you're doing fine.”

Later old Dionaid took him aside to bid him refresh himself from a brew of rum and lemons she had made, with spice and a flavour of old brandy—“Barra Punch” she called it—and then asked him if he had any sorrow at the back of his heart.

“Just this,” he said in a whisper, “that Rory MacAlpine's fëy.”

“Fëy, my lad, an' for why that? For sure, I'm thinking it's fëy with the good drink you have had all day, an' now here am I spoiling ye with more.”

“Hush, woman; I'm not speaking of what comes wi' a drop to the bad. But I had a dream, I had; a powerful strange dream, for sure. I had it a month ago; I had it the night before I left Strathanndra; and I had it this very day of the days, as I lay sleepin' off the

By the Yellow Moonrock

kindness I had since I came into Strath-raonull."

"An' what will that dream be, now?"

"Sure, it's a strange dream, Dionaid Macalister. You know the great yellow stone that rises out of the heather on the big moor of Dalmonadh, a mile or more beyond Tom-nashée?"

"Ay, the Moonrock they call it; it that fell out o' the skies, they say."

"The Yellow Moonrock. Ay, the Yellow Moonrock; that's its name, for sure. Well, the first time I dreamed of it I saw it standing fair yellow in the moonshine. There was a moorfowl sitting on it, and it flew away. When it flew away I saw it was a ptarmigan, but she was as clean brown as though it were summer and not midwinter, and I thought that strange."

"How did you know it was a ptarmigan? It might have been a moorhen or a——"

"Hoots, woman, how do I know when it's wet or fine, when it's day or night? Well, as I was saying, I thought it strange; but I hadn't turned over that thought on its back before it was gone like the shadow o' a peewit, and I saw standing before me the beautifullest woman I ever saw in all my life. I've had sweethearts here and sweethearts there,

By the Yellow Moonrock

Dionaid-nic-Tormod, and long ago I loved a lass who died, Sìne MacNeil; but not one o' these, not sweet Sìne herself, was like the woman I saw in my dream, who had more beauty upon her than them altogether, or than all the women in Strathraonull and Strath-andra."

"Have some more Barra punch, Rory," said Miss Macalister drily.

"Whist, ye old fule, begging your pardon for that same. She was as white as new milk, an' her eyes were as dark as the two black pools below Annora Linn, an' her hair was as long an' wavy as the shadows o' a willow in the wind; an' she sat an' she sang, an' if I could be remembering that song now it's my fortune I'd be making, an' that quick too."

"And where was she?"

"Why, on the Moonrock, for sure. An' if I hadn't been a good Christian I'd have bowed down before her, because o'—because—well, because o' that big stare out of her eyes she had, an' the beauty of her, an' all. An' what's more, by the Black Stone of Iona, if I hadn't been a God-fearin' man I'd have run to her, an' put my arms round her, an' kissed the honey lips fo her till she cried out, 'For the Lord's sake, Rory MacAlpine, leave off!'"

By the Yellow Moonrock

“It’s well seen you were only in a dream, Rory MacAlpine.”

At another time Rory would have smiled at that, but now he just stared.

“She said no word,” he added, “but lifted a bit of hollow wood or thick reed. An’ then all at once she whispered, ‘I’m bonnie St. Bride of the Mantle,’ an’ wi’ that she began to play, an’ it was the finest, sweet, gentle, little music in the world. But a big fear was on me, an’ I just turned an’ ran.”

“No man’ll ever call ye a fool again to my face, Rory MacAlpine. I never had the thought you had so much sense.”

“She didna let me run so easy, for a grey bitch went yapping and yowling at my heels; an’ just as I tripped an’ felt the bad hot breath of the beast at my throat, I woke, an’ was wet wi’ sweat.”

“An’ you’ve had that dream three times?”

“I’ve had it three times, and this very day, to the Stones be it said. Now, you’re a wise woman, Dionaid Macalister, but can you tell me what that dream means?”

“If you’re really fëy, I’m thinking I can, Rory MacAlpine.”

“It’s a true thing: Himself knows it.”

“And what are you fëy of?”

By the Yellow Moonrock

“ I’m fëy with the beauty o’ that woman.”

“ There’s good women wi’ the fair looks on them in plenty, Rory; an’ if you prefer them bad, you needna wear out new shoon before you’ll find them.”

“ I’m fëy wi’ the beauty o’ that woman. I’m fëy wi’ the beauty o’ that woman that had the name o’ Bride to her.”

Dionaid Macalister looked at him with troubled eyes.

“ When she took up the reed, did you see anything that frightened you? ”

“ Ay. I had a bit fright when I saw a big black adder slip about the Moonrock as the ptarmigan flew off; an’ I had the other half o’ that fright when I thought the woman lifted the adder, but it was only wood or a reed, for amn’t I for telling you about the gentle, sweet music I heard? ”

Old Dionaid hesitated; then, looking about her to see that no one was listening, she spoke in a whisper:

“ An’ you’ve been fëy since that hour because o’ the beauty o’ that woman? ”

“ Because o’ the sore beauty o’ that woman.”

“ An’ it’s not the drink? ”

“ No, no, Dionaid Macalister. You women are always for hurting the feelin’s o’ the drink. It is not the innycent drink I am telling

By the Yellow Moonrock

you; for sure, no; no, no, it is not the drink."

"Then I'll tell you what it means, Rory MacAlpine. It wasn't Holy St. Bride——"

"I know that, ye old—, I mean, Miss Macalister."

"It was the face of the *Bhean-Nimhir* you saw, the face of *Nighean-Imhir*, an' this is St. Bride's Night, an' it is on this night of the nights she can be seen, an' beware o' that seeing, Rory MacAlpine."

"The *Bean-Nimhir*, the *Nighean-Imhir* . . . the Serpent Woman, the Daughter of Ivor——" muttered Rory; "where now have I heard tell o' the Daughter of Ivor?" Then he remembered an old tale of the isles, and his heart sank, because the tale was of a woman of the underworld who could suck the soul out of a man through his lips, and send it to slavery among the people of ill-will, whom there is no call to speak of by name; and if she had any spite, or any hidden wish that is not for our knowing, she could put the littleness of a fly's bite on the hollow of his throat, and take his life out of his body, and nip it and sting it till it was no longer a life, and till that went away on the wind that she chased with screams and laughter.

"Some say she's the wife of the Amadan-

By the Yellow Moonrock

Dhu, the Dark Fool," murmured Dionaid, crossing herself furtively, for even at Dalibrog it was all Protestantry now.

But Rory was not listening. He sat intent, for he heard music—a strange music.

Dionaid shook him by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Rory, man; you'll be having sleep on you in another minute."

Just then a loud calling for the piper was heard, and Rory went back to the dancers. Soon his pipes were heard, and the reels swung to that good glad music, and his face lighted up as he strode to and fro, or stopped and tap-tapped away with his right foot, while drone and chanter all but burst with the throng of sound in them.

But suddenly he began to play a reel that nigh maddened him, and his own face was wrought so that Dalibrog came up and signed to stop, and then asked him what in the name o' Black Donald he was playing.

Rory laughed foolishly.

"Oh, for sure, it's just a new reel o' my own. I call it 'The Reef of Ivor's Daughter.' An' a good reel it is too, although it's Rory MacAlpine says it."

"Who is she, an' what Ivor will you be speaking of?"

"Oh, ask the Amadan-Dhu; it's he will be

By the Yellow Moonrock

knowing that. No, no, now, I will not be naming it that name; sure, I will call it instead the Serpent-Reel."

"Come, now, Rory, you've played enough, an' if your wrist's not tired wi' the chanter, sure, it must be wi' lifting the drink to your lips. An' it's time, too, these lads an' lasses were off."

"No, no, they're waiting to bring in the greying of the day—St. Bride's Day. They'll be singing the hymn for that greying, 'Bride bhoidheach muime Chrìosda.'"

"Not they, if Dalibrog has a say in it! Come, now, have a drink with me, your own-foster-brother, an' then lie down an' sleep it off, an' God's good blessing be on you."

Whether it was Dalibrog's urgency, or the thought of the good drink he would have, and he with a terrible thirst on him after that lung-bursting reel of his, Rory went quietly away with the host, and was on a mattress on the floor of a big, empty room, and snoring hard, long before the other pipers had ceased piping, or the last dancers flung their panting breaths against the frosty night.

III

An hour after midnight Rory woke with a start. He had "a spate of a headache on," he

By the Yellow Moonrock

muttered, as he half rose and struck a match against the floor. When he saw that he was still in his brave gear, and had lain down "just as he was," and also remembered all that had happened and the place he was in, he wondered what had waked him.

Now that he thought of it, he had heard music: yes, for sure, music—for all that it was so late, and after every one had gone home. What was it? It was not any song of his own, nor any air he had. He must have dreamed that it came across great lonely moors, and had a laugh and a moan and a sudden cry in it.

He was cold. The window was open. That was a stupid, careless thing of Donald Macalister to do, and he sober, as he always was, though he could drink deep; on a night of frost like this Death could slip in on the back of a shadow and get his whisper in your ear before you could rise for the stranger.

He stumbled to his feet and closed the window. Then he lay down again, and was nearly asleep, and was confused between an old prayer that rose in his mind like a sunken spar above a wave; and whether to take Widow Sheen a packet of great thick Sabbath peppermints, or a good heavy twist of tobacco; and a strange delightful memory

By the Yellow Moonrock

of Dionaid Macalister's brew of rum and lemons with a touch of old brandy in it; when again he heard that little, wailing, fantastic air, and sat up with the sweat on his brow.

The sweat was not there only because of the little thin music he heard, and it the same, too, as he had heard before; but because the window was wide open again, though the room was so heavy with silence that the pulse of his heart made a noise like a jumping rat.

Rory sat, as still as though he were dead, staring at the window. He could not make out whether the music was faint because it was so far away, or because it was played feebly, like a child's playing, just under the sill.

He was a big, strong man, but he leaned and wavered like the flame of a guttering candle in that slow journey of his from the mattress to the window. He could hear the playing now quite well. It was like the beautiful, sweet song of "Bride bhoidheach muime Chriosda," but with the holy peace out of it, and with a little, evil, hidden laugh flapping like a wing against the blessed name of Christ's foster-mother. But when it sounded under the window, it suddenly was far; and when it was far, the last circling pee-wit-lilt would be at his ear like a skiffing bat.

When he looked out, and felt the cold night

By the Yellow Moonrock

lie on his skin, he could not see because he saw too well. He saw the shores of the sky filled with dancing lights, and the great lighthouse of the moon sending a foam-white stream across the delicate hazes of frost which were too thin to be seen, and only took the sharp edges off the stars, or sometimes splintered them into sudden dazzle. He was like a man in a sailless, rudderless boat, looking at the skies because he lay face upward and dared not stoop and look into the dark, slipping water alongside.

He saw, too, the hornlike curve of Tom-nashee black against the blueness, and the inky line of Dalmonadh Moor beyond the plummy mass of Dalibrog woods, and the near meadows where a leveret jumped squealing, and then the bare garden with ragged gooseberry-bushes like scraggy, hunched sheep, and at last the white gravel-walk bordered with the withered roots of pinks and southernwood.

Then he looked from all these great things and these little things to the ground beneath the window. There was nothing there. There was no sound. Not even far away could he hear any faint, devilish music. At least——

Rory shut the window, and went back to his mattress and lay down.

“By the sun an’ wind,” he exclaimed, “a

By the Yellow Moonrock

man gets fear on him nowadays, like a cold in the head when a thaw comes."

Then he lay and whistled a blithe catch. For sure, he thought, he would rise at dawn and drown that thirst of his in whatever came first to hand.

Suddenly he stopped whistling, and on the uplift of a liltng turn. In a moment the room was full of old silence again.

Rory turned his head slowly. The window was wide open.

A sob died in his throat. He put his hands to his dry mouth; the back of it was wet with the sweat on his face.

White and shaking, he rose and walked steadily to the window. He looked out and down: there was no one, nothing.

He pulled the ragged cane chair to the sill, and sat there, silent and hopeless.

Soon big tears fell one by one, slowly, down his face. He understood now. His heart filled with sad, bitter grief, and brimmed over, and that was why the tears fell.

It was his hour that had come and opened the window.

He was cold, and as faint with hunger and heavy with thirst as though he had not put a glass to his lips or a bit to his mouth for days instead of for hours; but for all that, he did

By the Yellow Moonrock

not feel ill, and he wondered and wondered why he was to die so soon, and he so well-made and handsome, and unmarried too, and now with girls as eager to have him as trouts for a May fly.

And after a time Rory began to dream of that great beauty that had troubled his dreams; and while he thought of it, and the beautiful, sweet wonder of the woman who had it, she whom he had seen sitting in the moonshine on the yellow rock, he heard again the laughing, crying, fall and lilt of that near and far song. But now it troubled him no more.

He stooped, and swung himself out of the window, and at the noise of his feet on the gravel a dog barked. He saw a white hound running swiftly across the pasture beyond him. It was gone in a moment, so swiftly did it run. He heard a second bark, and knew that it came from the old deerhound in the kennel. He wondered where that white hound he had seen came from, and where it was going, and it silent and white and swift as a moonbeam, with head low and in full sleuth.

He put his hand on the sill, and climbed into the room again; lifted the pipes which he or Donald Macalister had thrown down beside

By the Yellow Moonrock

the mattress; and again, but stealthily, slipped out of the window.

Rory walked to the deerhound and spoke to it. The dog whimpered, but barked no more. When the piper walked on, and had gone about a score yards, the old hound threw back his head and gave howl upon howl, long and mournful. The cry went from stead to stead; miles and miles away the farm-dogs answered.

Perhaps it was to drown their noise that Rory began to finger his pipes, and at last let a long drone go out like a great humming cockchafer on the blue frosty stillness of the night. The crofters at Moor Edge heard his pibroch as he walked swiftly along the road that leads to Dalmonadh Moor. Some thought it was uncanny; some that one of the pipers had lost his way, or made an early start; one or two wondered if Rory MacAlpine were already on the move, like a hare that could not be long in one form.

The last house was the gamekeeper's, at Dalmonadh Toll, as it was still called. Duncan Grant related next day that he was wakened by the skreigh of the pipes, and knew them for Rory MacAlpine's by the noble, masterly fashion in which drone and chanter gave out their music, and also because that music was the strong, wild, fearsome reel that Rory

had played last in the byres, that which he had called "The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor."

"At that," he added, each time he told the tale, "I rose and opened the window, and called to MacAlpine. 'Rory,' I cried, 'is that you?'"

"'Ay,' he said, stopping short, an' giving the pipes a lilt. 'Ay, it's me an' no other, Duncan Grant.'

"'I thought ye would be sleeping sound at Dalibrog?'"

"But Rory made no answer to that, and walked on. I called to him in the English: 'Dinna go out on the moor, Rory! Come in, man, an' have a sup o' hot porridge an' a mouthful with them.' But he never turned his head; an' as it was cold an' dark, I said to myself that doited fools must gang their ain gait, an' so turned an' went to my bed again, though I hadn't a wink so long as I could hear Rory playing."

But Duncan Grant was not the last man who heard "The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor."

A mile or more across Dalmonadh Moor the heather-set road forks. One way is the cart-way to Balnaree; the other is the drover's way to Tom-na-shee and the hill countries beyond.

By the Yellow Moonrock

It is up this, a mile from the fork, that the Yellow Moonrock rises like a great fang out of purple lips. Some say it is of granite, and some marble, and that it is an old cromlech of the forgotten days; others that it is an unknown substance, a meteoric stone believed to have fallen from the moon.

Not near the Moonrock itself, but five score yards or more away, and perhaps more ancient still, there is a group of three lesser fang-shaped boulders of trap, one with illegible runic writing or signs. These are familiar to some as the Stannin' Stanes; to others, who have the Gaelic, as the Stone Men, or simply as the Stones, or the Stones of Dalmonadh. None knows anything certain of this ancient cromlech, though it is held by scholars to be of Pictish times.

Here a man known as Peter Lamont, though commonly as Peter the Tinker, an idle, homeless vagrant, had taken shelter from the hill-wind which had blown earlier in the night, and had heaped a bed of dry bracken. He was asleep when he heard the wail and hum of the pipes.

He sat up in the shadow of one of the Stones. By the stars he saw that it was still the black of the night, and that dawn would not be astir for three hours or more. Who

could be playing the pipes in that lonely place at that hour?

The man was superstitious, and his fears were heightened by his ignorance of what the unseen piper played (and Peter the Tinker prided himself on his knowledge of pipe music) and by the strangeness of it. He remembered, too, where he was. There was not one in a hundred who would lie by night among the Stannin' Stanes, and he had himself been driven to it only by heavy weariness and fear of death from the unsheltered cold. But not even that would have made him lie near the Moonrock. He shivered as memories of wild stories rose ghastly one after the other.

The music came nearer. The tinker crawled forward, and hid behind the Stone next the path, and cautiously, under a tuft of bracken, stared in the direction whence the sound came.

He saw a tall man striding along in full Highland gear, with his face death-white in the moonshine, and his eyes glazed like those of a leistered salmon. It was not till the piper was close that Lamont recognised him as Rory MacAlpine.

He would have spoken—and gladly, in that lonely place, to say nothing of the curiosity that was on him—had it not been for those glazed eyes and that set, death-white face.

By the Yellow Moonrock

The man was fëy. He could see that. It was all he could do not to leap away like a rabbit.

Rory MacAlpine passed him, and played till he was close on the Moonrock. Then he stopped, and listened, leaning forward as though straining his eyes to see into the shadow.

He heard nothing, saw nothing, apparently. Slowly he waved a hand across the heather.

Then suddenly the piper began a rapid talking. Peter the Tinker could not hear what he said, perhaps because his own teeth chattered with the fear that was on him. Once or twice Rory stretched his arms, as though he were asking something, as though he were pleading.

Suddenly he took a step or two forward, and in a loud, shrill voice cried:

“By Holy St. Bride, let there be peace between us, white woman!

“I do not fear you, white woman, because I too am of the race of Ivor:

“My father’s father was the son of Ivor mhic Alpein, the son of Ivor the Dark, the son of Ivor Honeymouth, the son of Ruaridh, the son of Ruaridh the Red, of the straight, unbroken line of Ivor the King:

“I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm, white woman:

“This is the Day of Bride, the day for the

By the Yellow Moonrock

daughter of Ivor. It is Rory MacAlpine who is here, of the race of Ivor. I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm:

“Sure, now, it was you who sang. It was you who sang. It was you who played. It was you who opened my window:

“It was you who came to me in a dream, daughter of Ivor. It was you who put your beauty upon me. Sure, it is that beauty that is my death, and I am hungering and thirsting for it.”

Having cried thus, Rory stood, listening, like a crow on a furrow when it sees the wind coming.

The tinker, trembling, crept a little nearer. There was nothing, no one.

Suddenly Rory began singing in a loud, chanting, monotonous voice:

“An diugh La’ Bride
Thig nighean Imhir as a chnoc,
Cha bhean mise do nighean Imhir,
'S cha bhean Imhir dhomh.”

(To-day the day of Bride,
The daughter of Ivor shall come from the knoll;
I will not touch the daughter of Ivor,
Nor shall the daughter of Ivor touch me.)

Then, bowing low, with fantastic gestures, and with the sweep of his plaid making a shadow like a flying cloud, he sang again:

By the Yellow Moonrock

“La’ Bride nam brig ban
Thig an rigen ran a tom
Cha bhoin mise ris an rigen ran,
’S cha bhoin an rigen ran ruim.”

(On the day of Bride of the fair locks,
The noble queen will come from the hill;
I will not molest the noble queen,
Nor will the noble queen molest me.)

“An’ I, too, Nighean Imhir,” he cried in a voice more loud, more shrill, more plaintive yet, “will be doing now what our own great forbear did, when he made *tabhartas agus tuis* to you, so that neither he nor his seed for ever should die of you; an’ I, too, Ruaridh MacDhonnuille mhic Alpein, will make offering and incense.” And with that Rory stepped back, and lifted the pipes, and flung them at the base of the Yellow Moonrock, where they caught on a jagged spar and burst with a great wailing screech that made the hair rise on the head of Peter the Tinker, where he crouched sick with the white fear.

“That for my *tabhartas*,” Rory cried again, as though he were calling to a multitude; “an’ as I’ve no *tuis*, an’ the only incense I have is the smoke out of my pipe, take the pipe an’ the tobacco too, an’ it’s all the smoke I have or am ever like to have now, an’ as good incense too as any other, daughter of Ivor.”

Suddenly Peter Lamont heard a thin,

By the Yellow Moonrock

strange, curling, twisting bit of music, so sweet for all its wildness that cold and hunger went below his heart. It grew louder, and he shook with fear. But when he looked at Rory MacAlpine, and saw him springing to and fro in a dreadful reel, and snapping his fingers and flinging his arms up and down like flails, he could stand no more, but with a screech rose and turned across the heather, and fluttered and fell and fell and fluttered like a wounded snipe.

He lay still once, after a bad fall, for his breath was like a thistledown blown this way and that above his head. It was on a heathery knoll, and he could see the Moonrock yellow-white in the moonshine. The savage lilt of that jiggling wild air still rang in his ears, with never a sweetness in it now, though when he listened it grew fair and lightsome, and put a spell of joy and longing in him. But he could see nothing of Rory.

He stumbled to his knees and stared. There was something on the road.

He heard a noise as of men struggling. But all he saw was Rory MacAlpine swaying and swinging, now up and now down; and then at last the piper was on his back in the road and tossing like a man in a fit, and screeching with a dreadful voice, "Let me go! let me go!"

By the Yellow Moonrock

Take your lips off my mouth! take your lips off my mouth!"

Then, abruptly, there was no sound, but only a dreadful silence; till he heard a rush of feet, and heard the heather-sprigs break and crack, and something went past him like a flash of light.

With a scream he flung himself down the heather knoll, and ran like a driven hare till he came to the white road beyond the moor; and just as dawn was breaking, he fell in a heap at the byre-edge at Dalmonadh Toll, and there Duncan Grant found him an hour later, white and senseless still.

Neither Duncan Grant nor any one else believed Peter Lamont's tale, but at noon the tinker led a reluctant few to the Yellow Moonrock.

The broken pipes still hung on the jagged spar at the base. Half on the path and half on the heather was the body of Rory MacAlpine. He was all but naked to the waist, and his plaid and jacket were as torn and ragged as Lamont's own, and the bits were scattered far and wide. His lips were blue and swelled. In the hollow of his hairy, twisted throat was a single drop of black blood.

"It's an adder's bite," said Duncan Grant.

None spoke.

LOST

I had heard of Mànus Macleod before I met him, a year or more ago, in the South Isles. He had a tragic history. The younger *fiùran* of the younger branch of a noble family, he was born and bred in poverty. At twenty he was studying for the priesthood; nearly two years later he met Margred Colquhoun; when he was twenty-two he was ordained; in his twenty-third year love carried him away on a strong and bitter tide; the next, he was unfrocked; the next again, Margred was dead, and her child too, and Mànus was a wandering broken man.

After some years, wherein he made a living none knows how, he joined a band of gypsies. They were not tinkers, but of the Romany clan, the *Treubh-Siubhail* or Wandering Race. He married a girl of that people, who was drowned while crossing the great ford of Uist; for she fell in the dusk, and was not seen, and the incoming tide took her while a swoon held her life below the heart. It was about this time that he became known as

Mànus-am-Bard, Manus the poet, because of his songs, and his Cruit-Spànteach or guitar, which had belonged to the girl, and upon which she had taught him to play fantastic savage airs out of the East.

He must have been about forty when he became an outcast from the Romanies. I do not know the reason, but one account seems not improbable: that, in a drunken fit, he had tried to kill and had blinded Gillanders Caird, the brother of the girl whom he had lost.

Thereafter he became an idle and homeless tramp, a suspect even, but sometimes welcome because of his songs and music. A few years later he was known as Father Mànus, head of a dirty, wandering tribe of tinkers. He lived in the open, slept in a smoky, ill-smelling tent, had a handsome, evil, dishevelled woman as his mate, and three brown, otter-eyed offspring of his casual love.

It was at this period that a lawyer from Inveraray sought him out, and told him that because of several deaths he had become heir to the earldom of Hydallan: and asked if he would give up his vagrant life and make ready for the great change of estate which was now before him.

Mànus Macleod took the short, black cutty out of his mouth. "Come here, Dougal," he

cried to one of his staring boys. The boy had a dead cockerel in his hands, and was plucking it. "Tell the gentleman, Dougal, where you got that."

The boy answered sullenly that it was one o' dad's fowls.

"You lie," said his father; "speak out, or I'll slit your tongue for you."

"Well, then, for sure, I lifted it from Farmer Jamieson's henyard; an' by the same token you ca'ed me to do it."

Mànus looked at the lawyer.

"Now, you've seen me, an' you've seen my eldest brat. Go back an' tell my Lord Hydallan what you've seen. If he dies, I'll be Earl of Hydallan, an' that evil-eyed thief there would be master of Carndhu, an' my heir, if only he wasn't the bastard he is. An' neither now nor then will I change my way of life. Hydallan Chase will make fine camping-ground, an' with its fishings and shootings will give me an' my folk all we need, till I'm tired o' them, when others can have them; I mean others of *our* kind. As for the money . . . well, I will be seeing to that in my own way, Mr. What's-your-name. . . . Finlay, are you for saying? . . . Well, then, good-day to you, Mr. Finlay, an' you can let me know when my uncle's dead."

Lost

I suppose it was about a year after this that I found one day at a friend's house a little book of poems bearing my own surname, with *Mànus* before it as that of the author. The imprint showed that the book had been issued by a publisher in Edinburgh some twenty years back. It was the one achievement of *Mànus*, for whom all his kin had once so high hopes, and much of it seems to have been written when he was at the Scots College in Rome. I copied two of the poems. One was called "Cantilena Mundi," the other "The Star of Beauty." I quote the one I can remember :

It dwells not in the skies,
 My Star of Beauty!
'Twas made of her sighs,
Her tears and agonies,
The fire in her eyes,
 My Star of Beauty!

Lovely and delicate,
 My Star of Beauty!
How could she master Fate,
Although she gave back hate
Great as my love was great,
 My Star of Beauty!

I loved, she hated, well,
 My Star of Beauty!
Soon, soon the passing bell:
She rose, and I fell:
Soft shines in deeps of hell
 My Star of Beauty!

Lost

I recalled this poem when, in Colonsay, I met Mànus Macleod, and remembered his story.

He was old and ragged. He had deserted, or been deserted by, his tinker herd; and wandered now, grey and dishevelled, from hamlet to hamlet, from parish to parish, from isle to isle. It was late October, and a premature cold had set in. The wind had shifted some of the snow on the mountains of Skye and Mull, and some had fallen among the old black ruins on Oronsay and along the Colonsay dunes of sand and salt bent. Mànus was in the inn kitchen, staring into the fire, and singing an old Gaelic song below his breath.

When my name was spoken, he looked up quickly.

An instinct made me say this:

“I can give you song for song, Mànus mac Tormod.”

“How do you know that my father’s name was Norman?” he asked in English.

“How do I know that as Tormod mhic Leoid’s son, son of Tormod of Arrasay, you are heir to his brother Hydallan?”

Mànus frowned. Then he leaned over the fire, warming his thin, gaunt hands. I could see the flame-flush in them.

Lost

“What song can you give me for my song—which, for sure, is not mine at all, at all, but the old sorrowful song by Donull MacDonull of Uist, ‘The Broken Heart?’”

“It is called ‘The Star of Beauty,’” I said, and quoted the first verse.

He rose and stooped over the fire. Abruptly he turned, and in swift silence walked from the room. His face was clay-white, and glistened with the streaming wet of tears.

The innkeeper’s wife looked after him. “A bad evil wastrel that,” she said; “these tinkers are ill folk at the best, and Mànus Macleod is one o’ the worst o’ them. For sure, now, why should you be speaking to the man at all, at all? A dirty, ignorant man he is, with never a thought to him but his pipe an’ drink an’ other people’s goods.”

The following afternoon I heard that Mànus was still in the loft, where he had been allowed to rest. He was on death’s lips, I was told.

I went to him. He smiled when he saw me. He seemed years and years younger, and not ill at all but for the leaf of flame on his white face and the wild shine in his great black eyes.

“Give me a wish,” he whispered.

“Peace,” I said.

He looked long at me.

Lost

"I have seen the Red Shepherd," he said.

I knew what he meant, and did not answer.

"And the dark flock of birds," he added.

"And last night, as I came here out of Oronsay, I saw a white hound running before me till I came here."

There was silence for a time.

"And I have written this," he muttered hoarsely. "It is all I have written in all these years since she died whom I loved. You can put it in the little book you know of if you have it." He gave me an old leathern case. In it was a dirty, folded sheet. He died that night. By the dancing yellow flame of the peats, while the wind screamed among the rocks, and the sea's gathering voices were more and more lamentable and dreadful, I read what he had given me. But in paraphrasing his simpler and finer Gaelic, I may also alter his title of "Whisperings (or secret Whisperings) in the Darkness" to "The Secrets of the Night," because of the old Gaelic saying, "The Red Shepherd, the White Hound, and the Dark Flock of Birds: the Three Secrets (or secret terrors) of the Night:"

In the great darkness where the shimmering stars

Are as the dazzle of the luminous wave

Moveth the shadow of the end of wars:

But nightly arises, as out of a bloody grave,

Lost

The Red Swineherd, he who has no name,
But who is gaunt, terrible, an awful flame
 Fed upon blood and perishing lives and tears;
 His feet are heavy with the bewildering years
Trodden dim bygone ages, and his eyes
Are black and vast and void as midnight skies.

Beware of the White Hound whose baying no man
 hears,
 Though it is the wind that shakes the unsteady
 stars:
 It is the Hound seen of men in old forlorn wars:
It is the Hound that hunts the stricken years.
 Pale souls in the ultimate shadows see it gleam
 Like a long lance o' the moon, and as a moon-white
 beam
It comes, and the soul is as blown dust within the
 wood
Wherein the White Hound moves where timeless
 shadows brood.

Have heed, too, of the flock of birds from twilight
 places,
 The desolate haunted ways of ancient wars—
Bewildered, terrible, winged, and shadowy faces
 Of homeless souls adrift 'neath drifting stars.
But this thing surely I know, that he, the Red Flame,
 And the White Hound, and the Dark Flock of Birds,
 Appal me no more, who never, never again
 Through all the rise and set and set and rise
 of pain
 Shall hear the lips of her whom I loved uttering
 words,
Or hear my own lips in her shadowy hair naming her
 name.

MORAG OF THE GLEN

I

It was a black hour for Archibald Campbell of Gorromalt in Strathglas, and for his wife, and for Morag their second daughter, when the word came that Muireall had the sorrow of sorrows. What is pain, and is death a thing to fear? But there is a sorrow that no man can have and yet go free for evermore of a shadow upon his brow: and there is a sorrow that no woman can have and keep the moonshine in her eyes. And when a woman has this sorrow, it saves or mars her: though, for sure, none of us may discern just what that saving may be, or from whom or what, or what, may be the bitter or sweet ruin. We are shaped as clay in the potter's hand: ancient wisdom, that we seldom learn till the hand is mercifully still, and the vessel finished for good or evil, is broken.

It is a true saying that memory is like the seaweed when the tide is in—but the tide ebbs. Each frond, each thick spray, each fillicaun or

Morag of the Glen

pulpy globe, lives lightly in the wave: the green water is full of strange rumour, of sea-magic and sea-music: the hither flow and thither surge give continuity and connection to what is fluid and dissolute. But when the ebb is far gone, and the wrack and the weed lie sickly in the light, there is only one confused, intertangled mass. For most of us, memory is this tide-left strand: though for each there are pools, or shallows which even the ebb does not lick up in its thirsty way depthward—narrow overshadowed channels to which we have the intangible clues. But for me there will never be any ebb-tide of memory, of one black hour, and one black day.

A wild lone place it was where we lived: among the wet hills, in a country capped by slate-black mountains. To the stranger the whole scene must have appeared grimly desolate. We, dwellers there, and those of our clan, and the hill folk about and beyond, knew that there were three fertile straths hidden among the wilderness of rock and bracken: Strathmòr, Strathgorm, and Strathglas. It was in the last we lived. All Strathglas was farmed by Archibald Campbell, and he had Strathgorm to where the Gorrormalt Water cuts it off from the head of Glen Annet. The house we lived in was a long, two-storied

Morag of the Glen

whitewashed building with projecting flanks. There was no garden, but only a tangled potato-acre, and a large unkempt space where the kail and the bracken flourished side by side, with the kail perishing day by day under the spreading, strangling roots of the usurper. The rain in Strathglas fell when most other spots were fair. It was because of the lie of the land, I have heard. The grey or black cloud would slip over Ben-Bhreac or Mel-bèinn, and would become blue-black while one were wondering if the wind would lift it on to Maol-Dunn, whose gloomy ridge had two thin lines of pine trees which, from Strathglas, stood out like bristling eyebrows. But, more likely than not, it would lean slowly earthward, then lurch like a water-logged vessel, and spill, spill, through a rising misty vapour, a dreary downfall. Oh! the rain—the rain—the rain! how weary I grew of it, there; and of the melancholy *méh'ing* of the sheep, that used to fill the hills with a lamentation, terrible, at times, to endure.

And yet, I know, and that well, too, that I am thinking this vision of Teenabrae, as the house was called, and of its dismal vicinage, in the light of tragic memory. For there were seasons when the rains suspended, or came and went like fugitive moist shadows: days

Morag of the Glen

when the sunlight and the wind made the mountains wonderful, and wrought the wild, barren hills to take on a softness and a dear, familiar beauty: hours, even, when, in the hawthorn-time, the cuckoo called joyously across the pine-girt scaurs and corries on Melbèinn, or, in summer, the swallows filled the straths as with the thridding of a myriad shuttles.

Sure enough, I was too young to be there: though, indeed, Morag was no more than a year older, being twenty; but when my mother died, and my father went upon the seas upon one of his long whaling voyages, I was glad to leave my lonely home in the Carse o' Gowrie and go to Teenabrae in Strathglas, and to be with my aunt, that was wife to Archibald mac Alasdair Ruadh—Archibald Campbell, as he would be called in the lowland way—or Gorrromalt as he was named by courtesy, that being the name of his sheep-farm that ran into the two straths where the Gorrromalt Water surged turbulently through a narrow wilderness of wave-scooped, eddy-hollowed stones and ledges.

I suppose no place could be called lifeless which had always that sound of Gorrromalt Water, that ceaseless lamentation of the sheep crying among the hills, that hoarse croaking

Morag of the Glen

of the corbies who swam black in the air betwixt us and Maol-Dunn, that mournful plaining of the lapwings as they wheeled querulously forever and ever and ever. But, to a young girl, the whole of this was an unspeakable weariness.

Beside the servant-folk—not one of whom was to me anything, save a girl called Maisie, who had had a child and believed it had become a “pee-wit” since its death, and that all the lapwings were the offspring of the sorrow of joy—there were only Archibald Campbell, his wife, who was my aunt, Muireall the elder daughter, and Morag. These were my folk: but Morag I loved. In appearance she and I differed wholly. My cousin Muireall and I were like each other; both tall, dark-haired, dark-browed, with dusky dark eyes, though mine with no flame in them; and my face too, though not uncomely, without that touch of wildness which made Muireall’s so strangely attractive, and at times so beautiful. Morag, however, was scarce over medium height. Her thick, wavy hair always retained the captive gold that the sunshine had spilled there; her soft, white, delicate, wild-rose face was like none other that I have ever seen: her eyes, of that heart-lifting blue which spring mornings have, held a living light that was fair to see,

Morag of the Glen

and gave pain too, perhaps, because of their plaintive hillside wildness. Ah, she was a fawn, Morag! . . . soft and sweet, swift and dainty and exquisite as a fawn in the green fern.

Gorromalt himself was a gaunt, stern man. He was two inches or more over six feet, but looked less, because of a stoop. It always seemed to me as if his eyes pulled him forward: brooding, sombre, obscure eyes, of a murky gloom. His hair was iron-grey and matted; blacker, but matted and tangled, his thick beard; and his face was furrowed like Ben Scorain of the Corries. I never saw him in any other garb than a grey shepherd tweed with a plaid, though no Campbell in Argyll was prouder than he, and he allowed no plaid or *tunag* anywhere on his land or in his house that was not of the tartan of MacCailin Mòr. He was what, there, they called a black protestant; for the people in that part held to the ancient faith. True enough, for sure, all the same: for his pity was black, and the milk of kindness in him must have been like Gorromalt Water in spate. Poor Aunt Elspeth! my heart often bled for her. I do not think Archibald Campbell was unkind to his wife, but he was harsh, and his sex was like a blank wall to her, against which her shallow waters

Morag of the Glen

surged or crawled alike vainly. There was to her something at once terrible and Biblical in this wall of cruel strength, this steadfast independence of love or the soft ways or the faltering speech of love. There are women who hate men with an unknowing hatred, who lie by their husband night after night, year after year; who fear and serve him; who tend him in life and minister to him in death; who die, before or after, with a slaying thirst, a consuming hunger. Of these unhappy house-mates, of desolate hearts and unfrequented lips, my aunt Elspeth was one.

It was on a dull Sunday afternoon that the dark hour came of which I have spoken. The rain fell among the hills. There was none on the north side of Strathglas, where Teenabrae stood solitary. The remembrance is on me keen just now: how I sat there on the bench in front of the house, side by side with Morag, in the hot August damp, with the gnats ping-ing overhead, and not a sound else save the loud, raucous surge of Gorromalt Water, thirty yards away. In a chair near us sat my aunt Elspeth. Beyond her, on a milking-stool, with his chin in his hands, and his elbows on his knees, was her husband.

There was a gloom upon all of us. The day before, as soon as Gorromalt had returned

Morag of the Glen

from Castle Avale, high up in Strathmòr, we had seen the black east wind in his eyes. But he had said nothing. We guessed that his visit to the Englishman at Castle Avale, who had bought the Three Straths from Sir Ewan Campbell of Drumdoon, had proved fruitless, or at least unsatisfactory. It was at the porridge on the Sabbath morning that he told us.

“And . . . and . . . must we go, Archibald?” asked his wife, her lips white, and the deep, withered creases on her neck ashy grey.

He did not answer, but the tumbler cracked in his grip, and the splintered glass fell into his plate. The spilt milk trickled off the table on to the end of his plaid, and so to the floor. Luath, the collie, slipped forward, with her tongue lolling greedily: but her eye caught the stare of the silent man, and with a whine, and a sudden sweep of her tail, she slunk back.

It must have been nigh an hour later, that he spoke.

“No, Elspeth,” he said. “There will be no going away from here, for you and me, till we go feet foremost.”

Before the afternoon we had heard all: how he had gone to see this English lord who had “usurped” Drumdoon: how he had not gained an interview, and had seen no other than Mr. Laing, the East Lothian factor. He had had

Morag of the Glen

to accept bitter, hard terms. Sir Ewan Campbell was in Madras, with his regiment, a ruined man: he would never be home again, and, if he were, would be a stranger in the Three Straths, where he and his had lived, and where his kindred had been born and had died during six centuries back. There was no hope. This Lord Greyshott wanted more rent, and he also wanted Strathgorm for a deer-run.

We were sitting, brooding on these things: in our ears the fierce words that Gorromalt had said, with bitter curses, upon the selling of the ancient land and the betrayal of the people.

Morag was in one of her strange moods. I saw her, with her shining eyes, looking at the birch that overhung the small foaming linn beyond us, just as though she saw the soul of it, and the soul with strange speech to it.

"Where is Muireall?" she said to me suddenly, in a low voice.

"Muireall?" I repeated, "Muireall? I am not for knowing, Morag. Why do you ask? Do you want her?"

She did not answer, but went on:

"Have you seen him again?"

"Him? . . . Whom?"

"Jasper Morgan, this English lord's son."

"No."

A long silence followed. Suddenly Aunt

Morag of the Glen

Elsbeth started. Pointing to a figure coming from the peat-moss at the hither end of Strathmòr, she asked who it was, as she could not see without her spectacles. Her husband rose, staring eagerly. He gave a grunt of disappointment when he recognised Mr. Allan Stewart, the minister of Strathmòr parish.

As the old man drew near we watched him steadfastly. I have the thought that each one of us knew he was coming to tell us evil news; though none guessed why or what, unless Morag mayhap.

When he had shaken hands, and blessed the house and those within it, Mr. Stewart sat down on the bench beside Morag and me. I am thinking he wanted not to see the eyes of Gorromalt, nor to see the white face of Aunt Elspeth.

I heard him whisper to my dear that he wanted her to go into the house for a little. But she would not. The birdeen knew that sorrow was upon us all. He saw "no" in her eyes, and forbore.

"And what is the thing that is on your lips to tell, Mr. Stewart?" said Gorromalt at last, half-mockingly, half-sullenly.

"And how are you for knowing that I have anything to tell, Gorromalt?"

"Sure, man, if a kite can see the shadow of

Morag of the Glen

a mouse a mile away, it can see a black cloud on a hill near by!"

"It's a black cloud I bring, Archibald Campbell: alas, even so. Ay, sure, it is a black cloud it is. God melt the pain of it!"

"Speak, man!"

"There is no good in wading in heather. Gorromalt, and you, Mrs. Campbell, and you, my poor Morag, and you too, my dear, must just be brave. It is God's will."

"Speak, man, and don't be winding the shroud all the time! Let us be hearing and seeing the thing you have brought to tell us.

It was at this moment that Aunt Elspeth half rose, and abruptly reseated herself, raising the while a deprecatory feeble hand.

"Is it about Muireall?" she asked quaveringly. "She went away, to the church at Kilbrennan, at sunrise: and the water's in spate all down Strathgorm. Has she been drowned? Is it death upon Muireall? Is it Muireall? Is it Muireall?"

"She is not drowned, Mrs. Campbell."

At that she sat back, the staring dread subsiding from her eyes. But at the minister's words, Gorromalt slowly moved his face and body so that he fronted the speaker. Looking at Morag I saw her face white as the canna. Her eyes swam in wet shadow.

Morag of the Glen

"It is not death, Mrs. Campbell," the old man repeated, with a strange, uneasy, furtive look, as he put his right hand to his stiff white necktie and flutteringly fingered it.

"In the name o' God, man, speak out!"

"Ay, ay, Campbell: ay, ay, I am speaking. . . . I am for the telling . . . but . . . but, see you, Gorromalt, be pitiful . . . be . . ."

Gorromalt rose. I never realised before how tall he was. There was height to him, like unto that of a son of Anak.

"Well, well, well, it is just for telling you I'll be. Sit down, Gorromalt, sit down, Mr. Campbell, sit down, man, sit down! . . . Ah, sure now, that is better. Well, well, God save us all from the sin that is in us: but . . . ah, mothering heart, it is saving you, I would be if I could, but . . . but . . ."

"But *what!*" thundered Gorromalt, with a voice that brought Maisie and Kirsteen out of the byre, where they were milking the kye.

"He has the mercy: He only! And it is this, poor people: it is this. Muireall has come to sorrow."

"What sorrow is the sorrow that is on her?"

"The sorrow of woman."

A terrible oath leaped from Gorromalt's

Morag of the Glen

lips. His wife sat in a stony silence, her staring eyes filming like those of a stricken bird. Morag put her left hand to her heart.

Suddenly Archibald Campbell turned to his daughter.

"Morag, what is the name of that man whom Muireall came to know, when she and you went to that Sodom, that Gomorrha, which men call London?"

"His name was Jasper Morgan."

"Has she ever seen him since?"

"I think so."

"You *think*? What will you be *thinking* for, girl! *Think!* There will be time enough to think while the lichen grows grey on a new-fall'n rock! Out with it! Out with it! Have they met? . . . Has he been here? . . . is *he* the man?"

There was silence then. A plover wheeled by, plaining aimlessly. Maisie the milk-lass ran forward, laughing.

"Ah, 'tis my wee Seorsa," she cried. "Seorsa! Seorsa! Seorsa!"

Gorromalt took a stride forward, his face shadowy with anger, his eyes ablaze.

"Get back to the kye, you wanton wench!" he shouted savagely. "Get back, or it is having my gun I'll be and shooting that pee-wit of yours, that lennavan-Seorsa!"

Morag of the Glen

Then, shaking still, he turned to Morag.

“Out with it, girl! What do you know?”

“I know nothing.”

“It is a lie, and it is knowing it I am!”

“It is no lie. I *know* nothing. I *fear* much.”

“And what do *you* know, old man?” And, with that, Archibald Campbell turned like a baited bull upon Mr. Stewart.

“She was misled, Gorrromalt, she was misled, poor lass! The trouble began last May, when she went away to the south, to that evil place. And then he came after her. And it was here he came . . . and . . . and . . .”

“And who will that man be?”

“Morag has said it: Jasper Morgan.”

“And who will Jasper Morgan be?”

“Are you not for knowing *that*, Archibald Campbell, and you Gorrromalt?”

“Why, what meaning are you at?” cried the man, bewildered.

“Who will Jasper Morgan be but the son of Stanley Morgan!”

“Stanley Morgan! . . . Stanley Morgan! I am no wiser. Do you wish to send me mad, man! Speak out! . . . out with it!”

“Why, Gorrromalt, what is Drumdoon’s name?”

Morag of the Glen

“Drumdoon . . . Why, Sir Ewan . . . Ah no, for sure 'tis now that English bread-taker, that southern land-snatcher, who calls himself Lord Greyshott. And what then? . . . will it be for . . .”

“Aren't you for knowing his name? . . . No? . . . Campbell, man, it is *Morgan* . . . *Morgan*.”

All this time Aunt Elspeth had sat silent. She now gave a low cry. Her husband turned and looked at her. “Go into the house,” he said harshly; “this will not be the time for whimpering; no, by God! it is not the time for whimpering, woman.”

She rose, and walked feebly over to Mr. Stewart.

“Tell me all,” she said. Ah, the grief to see the pain in her old, old eyes—and no tears there at all, at all.

“When this man Jasper Morgan, that is son to Lord Greyshott, came here, it was to track a stricken doe. And now all is over. There is this note only. It is for Morag.”

Gorromalt leaned forward to take it. But I had seen the wild look in Morag's eyes and I snatched it from Mr. Stewart, and gave it to my dear, who slipped it beneath her kerchief.

Sullenly her father drew up, scowled, but said nothing.

Morag of the Glen

“What else?” he asked, turning to the minister.

“She is dying.”

“Dying!”

“Ay, alas, alas—the mist is on the hill—the mist is on the hill—and she so young, too, and so fair, ay, and so sweet and——”

“That will do, Allan Stewart! That will do! . . . It is dying she is, you are for telling us! Well, well, now, and she the plaything o’ Jasper Morgan, the son of the man there at Drumdoon, the man who wants to drive me away from here . . . this *new* man . . . this, this lord . . . he . . . to drive *me* away, who have the years and years to go upon, ay, for more than six hundred weary, long years——”

“Muireall is dying, Archibald Campbell. Will you be coming to see her, who is your very own?”

“And for why is she dying?”

“She could not wait.”

“Wait! Wait! She could wait to shame me and mine! No, no, no, Allan Stewart, you go back to Lord Greyshott’s son and his *lean-nan*, and say that neither Gorrormalt nor any o’ Gorrormalt’s kith or kin will have aught to do with that wastrel-lass. Let her death be on her! But it’s a soon easy death it is! . . . she that slept here this very last night, and away

Morag of the Glen

this morning across the moor like a louping doe, before sunburst and an hour to that!"

"She is at the 'Argyll Arms' in Kilbrennan. She met the man there. An hour after he had gone, they found her, lying on the deerskin on the hearth, and she with the death-sickness on her, and grave-white, because of the poison there beside her. And now, Archibald Campbell, it is not refusing you will be to come to your own daughter, and she with death upon her, and at the edge o' the silence!"

But with that Gorromalt uttered wild, savage words, and thrust the old man before him, and bade him begone, and cursed Muireall, and the child she bore within her, and the man who had done this thing, and the father that had brought him into the world, latest adder of an evil brood!

Scarce, however, was the minister gone, and he muttering sore, and frowning darkly at that, than Gorromalt reeled and fell.

The blood had risen to his brain, and he had had a stroke. Sure, the sudden hand of God is a terrifying thing. It was all we could do, with the help of Maisie and Kirsteen, to lift and drag him to his bed.

But an hour after that, when the danger was over, I went to seek Morag. I could find her nowhere. Maisie had seen her last. I

Morag of the Glen

thought that she had taken one of the horses from the stable, and ridden toward Kilbrennan: but there was no sign of this. On the long, weary, moor-road that led across Strathglas to Strathgorm, she could not have walked without being seen by some one at Teenabrae. And everyone there was now going to and fro, with whispers and a dreadful awe.

So I turned and went down by the linn. From there I could see three places where Morag loved to lie and dream: and at one of these I hoped to descry her.

And sure, so it was. A glimpse I caught of her, across the spray of the linn. She was far up the brown Gorrormalt Water, and crouched under a rowan-tree.

When I reached her she looked up with a start. Ah, the pain of those tear-wet May-blue eyes—deep tarns of grief to me they seemed.

In her hand she clasped the letter that I had scratched for her.

“Read it, dear,” she said simply.

It was in pencil, and, strangely, was in the Gaelic: strangely, for though, when with Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, Morag and I spoke the language we all loved, and that was our own, Muireall rarely did. The letter ran somewhat thus:

Morag of the Glen

“MORAG-À-GHRAIDH :

“When you get this I shall not be your living sister any more, but only a memory. I take the little one with me. You know my trouble. Forgive me. I have only one thing to ask. The man has not only betrayed me, he has lied to me about his love. He loves another woman. And that woman, Morag, is you: and you know it. He loved you first. And now, Morag, I will tell you one thing only. Do you remember the story that old Sheen McIan told us—that about the twin sisters of the mother of our mother—one that was a Morag too?

“I am thinking you do: and here—where I shall soon be lying dead, with that silence within me, where such a wild, clamouring voice has been, though inaudible to other ears than mine—*here, I am thinking you will be remembering, and realising, that story!*

“If, Morag, *if* you do not remember—but ah, no, we are of the old race of Siol Dhiarmid, *and you will remember!*

“Tell no one of this, except F.— *at the end.*

“Morag, dear sister, till we meet——

“MUIREALL.”

Morag of the Glen

"I do not understand, Morag-my-heart," I said. Even now, my hand shook because of these words: "*and that woman, Morag, is you: and you know it.*"

"Not now," she answered, wearily. "I will tell you to-night: but not now."

And so we went back together; she, too tired and stricken for tears, and I with so many in my heart that there were none for my hot eyes.

As we passed the byre we heard Kirsteen finishing a milking song, but we stopped when Maisie suddenly broke in, with her strange, wild, haunting-sweet voice.

I felt Morag's fingers tighten in their grasp on my arm as we stood silent, with averted eyes, listening to an old Gaelic ballad of "Morag of the Glen."

When Morag of the Glen was fëy
They took her where the Green Folk stray:
And there they left her, night and day,
A day and night they left her, fëy.

And when they brought her home again,
Aye of the Green Folk was she fain:
They brought her *leannan*, Roy McLean,
She looked at him with proud disdain.

"For I have killed a man," she said,
"A better man than you to wed:
I slew him when he claspt my head,
And now he sleepeth with the dead.

Morag of the Glen

“And did you see that little wren?
My sister dear it was, flew then!
That skull her home, that eye her den,
Her song is, *Morag o' the Glen!*”

“For when she went I did not go,
But washed my hands in blood-red woe:
O wren, trill out your sweet song's flow,
Morag is white as the driven snow!”

II

That night the wind had a dreadful soughing in its voice—a mournful voice that came along the rain-wet face of the hills, with a prolonged moaning and sobbing.

Down in the big room, that was kitchen and sitting-room in one, where Gorrormalt sat—for he had risen from his bed, for all that he was so weak and giddy—there was darkness. His wife had pleaded for the oil-lamp, because the shadows within and the wild wind without—though, I am thinking, most the shadows within her brain—filled her with dread; but he would not have it, no, not a candle even. The peats glowed, red-hot; above them the small narrow pine-logs crackled in a scarlet and yellow blaze.

Hour after hour went by in silence. There were but the three of us. Morag? Ah, did Gorrormalt think she would stay at Teenabrae,

Morag of the Glen

and Muireall near by, and in the clutch of the death-frost, and she, her sister dear, not go to her? He had put the ban upon us, soon as the blood was out of his brain, and he could half rise from his pillow. No one was to go to see her, no one was to send word to her, no one was to speak of her.

At that, Aunt Elspeth had fallen on her knees beside the bed, and prayed to him to show pity. The tears rained upon the relentless, heavy hand she held and kissed. "At the least," she moaned, "at the least, let some one go to her, Archibald; at least a word, only one word!"

"Not a word, woman, not a word. She has sinned, but that's the way o' women o' that kind. Let her be. The wind'll blow her soul against God's heavy hand, this very night o' the nights. It's not for you nor for me. But I'm saying this, I am: curse her, ay, curse her again and again, for that she let the son of the stranger, the son of our enemy, who would drive us out of the home we have, the home of our fathers, ay, back to the time when no English foot ever trod the heather of Argyll, that she would let him do her this shame and disgrace, her and me, an' you too, ay, and all of our blood, and the Strath too, for that—ay, by God, and the clan, the whole clan!"

Morag of the Glen

But though Gorromalt's word was law there, there was one who had the tide coming in at one ear and going out at the other. As soon as the rainy gloom deepened into dark, she slipped from the house; I wanted to go with her, but she whispered to me to stay. It was well I did. I was able to keep back from him, all night, the story of Morag's going. He thought she was in her bed. So bitter on the man was his wrath, that, ill as he was, he would have risen, and ridden or driven over to Kilbrennan, had he known Morag was gone there.

Angus Macallum, Gorromalt's chief man, was with the horses in the stable. He tried to prevent Morag taking out Gealcas, the mare, she that went faster and surer than any there. He even put hand upon the lass, and said a rough word. But she laughed, I am told; and I am thinking that whoever heard Morag laugh, when she was "strange," for all that she was so white and soft, she with her hair o' sunlight, and the blue, blue eyes o' her!—whoever heard *that* would not be for standing in her way.

So Angus had stood back, sullenly giving no help, but no longer daring to interfere. She mounted Gealcas, and rode away into the dark, rainy night where the wind went louping

Morag of the Glen

to and fro among the crags on the braes as though it were mad with fear or pain, and complaining wild, wild—the lamentable cry of the hills.

Hour after hour we sat there. We could hear the roaring sound of Gorrromalt Water as it whirled itself over the linn. The stream was in spate, and would be boiling black, with livid clots of foam flung here and there on the dripping heather overhanging the torrent. The wind's endless sough came into the house, and wailed in the keyholes and the chinks. Rory, the blind collie, lay on a mat near the door, and the long hair of his felt was blown upward, and this way and that, by the ground-draught.

Once or twice Aunt Elspeth rose, and stirred the porridge that seethed and bubbled in the pot. Her husband took no notice. He was in a daze, and sat in his flanked leathern armchair, with his arms laid along the sides, and his down-clasping hands catching the red gleam of the peats, and his face, white and set, like that of a dead man looking out of a grated prison.

Once or twice, an hour or so before, when she had begun to croon some hymn, he had harshly checked her. But now when she hummed, and at last openly sang the Gaelic

Morag of the Glen

version of "The Lord's my Shepherd," he paid no heed. He was not hearing that, or anything she did. I could make nothing of the cold bitterness that was on his face. He brooded, I doubt not, upon doom for the man, and the son of the man, who had wrought him this evil.

His wife saw this, and so had her will at last. She took down the great Gaelic Bible, and read Christ's words about little children. The rain slashed against the window-panes. Beyond, the wind moaned, and souged, and moaned. From the kennel behind the byre a mournful howling rose and fell; but Gorromalt did not stir.

Aunt Elspeth looked at me despairingly. Poor old woman; ah, the misery and pain of it, the weariness and long pain of starved hearts and barren hopes. Suddenly an idea came to her. She rose again, and went over to the fire. Twice she passed in front of her husband. He made no sign.

"He hates those things," she muttered to me, her eyes wet with pain, and with something of shame, too, for admitting that she believed in incantations. And why not, poor old woman? Sure there are stranger things than *sian* or *rosad*, charm or spell; and who can say that the secret old wisdom is mere foam o'

Morag of the Glen

thought. "He hates those things, but I am for saving my poor lass if I can. I will be saying that old ancient *eolas*, that is called the *Eolas an t-Snaithean*."

"What is that, Aunt Elspeth? What are the three threads?"

"That *eolas* killed the mother of my mother, dearie; she that was a woman out of the isle of Benbecula."

"Killed her!" I repeated awe-struck.

"Ay; 'tis a charm for the doing away of bewitchment, and sure it is my poor Muireall who has been bewitched. But my mother's mother used the *eolas* for the taking away of a curse upon a cow that would not give milk. She was saying the incantation for the third time, and winding the triple thread round the beast's tail, when in a moment all the ill that was in the cow came forth and settled upon her, so that she went back to her house quaking and sick with the blight, and died of it next day, because there was no one to take it from her in turn by that or any other *eolas*."

I listened in silence. The thing seemed terrible to me then; no, no, not then only, but now, too, whenever I think of it.

"Say it then, Aunt Elspeth," I whispered; "say it, in the name of the Holy Three."

With that she went on her knees, and

Morag of the Glen

leaned against her chair, though with her face toward her husband, because of the fear that was ever in her. Then in a low voice, choked with sobs, she said this old *eolas*, after she had first uttered the holy words of the "Pater Noster":

*"Chi suil thu,
Labhraidh bial thu;
Smuainichidh cridhe thu.
Tha Fear an righthighe
Gad' choisreagahd,*

An t-Athair, am Mac, 's an Spiorad Naomh.

*"Cèathrar a rinn do chron—
Fear agus bean,
Gille agus nighean.
Co tha gu sin a thilleadh?*

*Tri Pearsannan na Trianaid ro-naomh,
An t-Athair, am Mac, 's an Spioraid Naomh.*

*"Tha mi 'cur fianuis gu Moire, agus gu Brighde,
Ma 's e duine rinn do chron,*

*Le droch run,
No le droch shuil,
No le droch chridhe,*

*Gu'm bi thusa, Muireall gu math,
Ri linn so a chur mu'n cuairt ort.*

An ainm an Athar, a' Mhic, 's an Spioraid Naomh!

*("An eye will see you,
Tongue will speak of you,
Heart will think of you,
The Man of Heaven
Blesses you—
The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

Morag of the Glen

“Four caused your hurt—
Man and Wife,
Young man, and maiden.
Who is to frustrate that?

The three Persons of the most Holy Trinity,
The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

“I call the Virgin Mary and St Briget to witness
That if your hurt was caused by man,
Through ill-will,
Or the evil eye,
Or a wicked heart,
That you, Muireall, my daughter, may be whole—
And this in the name of the Father, the Son, and
the Holy Ghost!”)

Just as she finished, and as she was lingering on the line, “*G’um bi thusa, Muireall gu math,*” Rory, the blind collie, rose, whimpered, and stood with snarling jaws.

Strangely enough, Gorrormalt heard this, though his ears had been deaf to all else, or so it seemed, at least.

“Down, Rory! down, beast!” he exclaimed, in a voice strangely shrill and weak.

But the dog would not be still. His sullen fear grew worse. Suddenly he sidled and lay on his belly, now snarling, now howling, his blind eyes distended, his nostrils quivering, his flanks quaking. My uncle rose and stared at the dog.

“What ails the beast?” he asked angrily,

Morag of the Glen

looking now at Rory, now at us. "Has any one come in? Has any one been at the door?"

"No one, Archibald."

"What have you been doing, Elspeth?"

"Nothing."

"Woman, I heard your voice droning at your prayers. Ah, I see—you have been at some of your *sians* and *eolais* again. Sure, now, one would be thinking you would have less foolishness, and you with the greyness upon your years. What *eolas* did she say, lass?"

I told him. "Aw, silly woman that she is, the *eolas an t-Snaithean!* madness and folly! . . . Where is Morag?"

"In bed." I said this with truth in my eyes. God's forgiveness for that good lie!

"And it's time you were there also, and you, too, Elspeth. Come now, no more of this foolishness. We have nothing to wait for. Why are we waiting here?"

At that moment Rory became worse than ever. I thought the poor blind beast would take some dreadful fit. Foam was on his jaws; his hair bristled. He had sidled forward, and crouched low. We saw him look again and again toward the blank space to his right, as if, blind though he was, he saw some one there, some one that gave him fear, but

Morag of the Glen

no longer a fierce terror. Nay, more than once we saw him swish his tail, and sniff as though recognisingly. But when he turned his head toward the door his sullen fury grew, and terror shook upon every limb. It was now that Gorromalt was speaking.

Suddenly the dog made a leap forward—a terrible bristling wolf he seemed to me, though no wolf had I ever seen, or imagined any more fearsome, than Rory, now.

He dashed himself against the door, snarling and mouthing, with his snout nosing the narrow slip at the bottom.

Aunt Elspeth and I shook with fear. My uncle was death-white, but stood strangely brooding. He had his right elbow upon his breast, and supported it with his left arm, while with his right hand he plucked at his beard.

“For sure,” he said at last, with an effort to seem at ease; “for sure the dog is fëy with his age and his blindness.” Then, more slowly still, “And if that were not so, it might look as though he had the fear on him, because of some one who strove to come in.”

“It is Muireall,” I whispered, scarce above my breath.

“No,” said Aunt Elspeth, and the voice of her now was as though it had come out of

Morag of the Glen

the granite all about us, cold and hard as that. "No! Muireall is already in the room."

We both turned and looked at her. She sat quite still, on the chair betwixt the fire and the table. Her face was rigid, ghastly, but her eyes were large and wild.

A look first of fear, then almost of tenderness, came into her husband's face.

"Hush, Elspeth," he said, "that is foolishness."

"It is not foolishness, Archibald," she resumed in the same hard, unemotional voice, but with a terrible intensity. "Man, man, because ye are blind, is there no sight for those who can see?"

"There is no one here but ourselves."

But now Aunt Elspeth half rose, with supplicating arms:

"Muireall! Muireall! Muireall. O muirnean, muirnean!"

I saw Archibald Campbell shaking as though he were a child and no strong man. "Will you be telling us this, Elspeth," he began in a hoarse voice—"will you be telling me this: if Muireall is in the room, beyond Rory there, who will be at the door? Who is trying to come in at the door?"

"It is a man. I do not know the man. It

Morag of the Glen

is a man. It is Death, maybe. I do not know the man. O Muirnean, mo muirnean!"

But now the great, gaunt black dog—terrible in his seeing blindness he was to me—began again his savage snarling, his bristling insensate fury. He had ceased a moment while our voices filled the room, and had sidled a little way toward the place where Aunt Elspeth saw Muireall, whining low as he did so, and swishing his tail furtively along the white-washed flagstones.

I know not what awful thing would have happened. It seemed to me that Death was coming to all of us.

But at that moment we all heard the sound of a galloping horse. There was a lull in the wind, and the rain lashed no more like a streaming whistling whip. Even Rory crouched silent, his nostrils quivering, his curled snout showing his fangs.

Gorromalt stood, listening intently.

"By the living God," he exclaimed suddenly, his eyes like a goaded bull's—"I know that horse. Only one horse runs like that at the gallop. 'Tis the grey stallion I sold three months ago to the man at Drumdoon—ay, ay, for the son of the man at Drumdoon! A horse to ride for the shooting—a good horse for the hills—that was what he wanted! Ay, ay, by

Morag of the Glen

God, a horse for the son of the man at Drumdoon! It's the grey stallion: no other horse in the Straths runs like that—d'ye hear? d'ye hear? Elspeth, woman, is there hearing upon you for *that*? Hey, *tlot-a-tlot, tlot-a-tlot, tlot-tlot-tlot-tlot, tlot-a-tlot, tlot-tlot-tlot!* I tell you, woman, it's the grey stallion I sold to Drumdoon: it's that and no other! Ay, by the Sorrow, it's Drumdoon's son that will be riding here!"

By this time the horse was close by. We heard his hoofs clang above the flagstones round the well at the side of the house. Then there was a noise as of scattered stones, and a long, scraping sound: then silence.

Gorromalt turned and put his hand to the door. There was murder in his eyes, for all the smile, a grim, terrible smile, that had come to his lips.

Aunt Elspeth rose and ran to him, holding him back. The door shook. Rory the hound tore at the splinters at the base of the door, his fell again bristling, his snarling savagery horrible to hear. The pine-logs had fallen into a smouldering ash. The room was full of gloom, though the red, sullen eye of the peat-glow stared through the obscurity.

"Don't be opening the door! Don't be opening the door!" she cried, in a thin, screaming voice.

Morag of the Glen

“What for no, woman? Let me go! Hell upon this dog—out o’ the way, Rory—get back! Down wi’ ye!”

“No, no, Archibald! Wait! Wait!”

Then a strange thing happened.

Rory ceased, sullenly listened, and then retreated, but no longer snarling and bristling.

Gorromalt suddenly staggered.

“Who touched me just now?” he asked in a hoarse whisper.

No one answered.

“Who touched me just now? Who passed? Who slid past me?” His voice rose almost to a scream.

Then, shaking off his wife, he swung the door open.

There was no one there. Outside could be heard a strange sniffing and whinnying. It was the grey stallion.

Gorromalt strode across the threshold. Scarcely had I time to prevent Aunt Elspeth from falling against the lintel in a corner, yet in a moment’s interval I saw that the stallion was riderless.

“Archibald!” wailed his wife faintly out of her weakness. “Archibald, come back! Come back!”

But there was no need to call. Archibald

Morag of the Glen

Campbell was not the man to fly in the face of God. He knew that no mortal rider rode that horse to its death that night. Even before he closed the door we heard the rapid, sliding, catching gallop. The horse had gone: rider or riderless I know not.

He was ashy-grey. Suddenly he had grown quite still. He lifted his wife, and helped her to her own big leathern arm-chair at the other side of the ingle.

"Light the lamp, lass," he said to me, in a hushed, strange voice. Then he stooped and threw some small pine-logs on the peats, and stirred the blaze till it caught the dry splintered edges.

Rory, poor blind beast, came wearily and with a low whine to his side, and then lay down before the warm blaze.

"Bring the Book," he said to me.

I brought the great leather-bound Gaelic Bible, and laid it on his knees.

He placed his hand in it, and opened at random.

"With Himself be the word," he said.

"Is it Peace?" asked Aunt Elspeth in a tremulous whisper.

"It is Peace," he answered, his voice gentle, his face stern as a graven rock. And what he read was this, where his eye chanced upon as

Morag of the Glen

he opened at the place where is the Book of the Vision of Nahum the Elkoshite:

“What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make a full end.”

After that there was a silence. Then he rose, and told me to go and lie down and sleep; for, on the morrow, after dawn, I was to go with him to where Muireall was.

I saw Aunt Elspeth rise and put her arms about him. They had peace. I went to my room, but after a brief while returned, and sat, in the quietness there, by the glowing peats, till dawn.

The greyness came at last; with it, the rain ceased. The wind still soughed and wailed among the corries and upon the rocky braes; with low moans sighing along the flanks of the near hills, and above the stony watercourse where the Gorrornalt surged with swirling foam and loud and louder tumult.

My eyes had closed in my weariness, when I heard Rory give a low growl, followed by a contented whimper. Almost at the same moment the door opened. I looked up, startled.

It was Morag.

She was so white, it is scarce to be wondered at that I took her at first for a wraith.

Morag of the Glen

Then I saw how drenched she was, chilled to the bone too. She did not speak as I led her in, and made her stand before the fire, while I took off her soaked dress and shoes. In silence she made all the necessary changes, and in silence drank the tea I brewed for her.

“Come to my room with me,” she whispered, as with quiet feet we crossed the stone flags and went up the wooden stair that led to her room.

When she was in bed she bade me put out the light and lie down beside her. Still silent, we lay there in the darkness, for at that side of the house the hill-gloom prevailed, and moreover the blind was down-drawn. I thought the weary moaning of the wind would make my very heart sob.

Then, suddenly, Morag put her arms about me, and the tears streamed warm about my neck.

“Hush, Morag-aghray, hush, mo-rùn,” I whispered in her ear. “Tell me what it is, dear! Tell me what it is!”

“Oh, and I loved him so! I loved him!”

“I know it, dear; I knew it all along.”

I thought her sobs would never cease till her heart was broken, so I questioned her again.

Morag of the Glen

“Yes,” she said, gaspingly, “yes, I loved him when Muireall and I were in the South together. I met him a month or more before ever she saw him. He loved me, and I promised to marry him: but I would not go away with him as he wished: for he said his father would never agree. And then he was angry, and we quarrelled. And I—Oh! I was glad too, for I did not wish to marry an Englishman—or to live in a dreary city; but . . . but . . . and then he and Muireall met, and he gave all his thought to her; and she her love to him.”

“And now?”

“Now? . . . *Now* Muireall is dead.”

“Dead? O Morag, *dead?* Oh, poor Muireall that we loved so! But did you see her? Was she alive when you reached her?”

“No; but she was alone. And now, listen. Here is a thing I have to tell you. When Ealasaid Cameron, that was my mother’s mother, was a girl, she had a cruel sorrow. She had two sisters whom she loved with all her heart. They were twins, Silis and Morag. One day an English officer at Fort William took Silis away with him as his wife; but when her child was heavy within her she discovered that she was no wife, for the man was already

Morag of the Glen

wedded to a woman in the South. She left him that night. It was bitter weather, and midwinter. She reached home through a wild snowdrift. It killed her; but before she died she said to Morag, 'He has killed me and the child.' And Morag understood. So it was that before any wind of spring blew upon that snow, the man was dead."

When Morag stopped here, and said no more, I did not at first realise what she meant to tell me. Then it flashed upon me.

"O Morag, Morag!" I exclaimed, terrified. "But, Morag, you do not . . . you will not. . . ."

"*Will* not?" she repeated, with a catch in her voice.

"Listen," she resumed suddenly after a long, strained silence. "While I lay beside my darling Muireall, weeping and moaning over her, and she so fair, with such silence where the laughter had always been, I heard the door open. I looked up: it was Jasper Morgan.

"'You are too late,' I said. I stared at the man who had brought her, and me, this sorrow. There was no light about him at all, as I had always thought. He was only a man as other men are, but with a cold, selfish heart and loveless eyes.

Morag of the Glen

“ ‘She sent for me to come back to her,’ he answered, though I saw his face grow ashy-grey as he looked at Muireall and saw that she was dead.

“ ‘She is dead, Jasper Morgan.’

“ ‘*Dead . . . Dead?*’

“ ‘Ay, dead. It is upon you, her death. Her you have slain, as though with your sword that you carry: her, and the child she bore within her, and that was yours.’

“ At that he bit his lip till the blood came.

“ ‘It is a lie,’ he cried. ‘It is a lie, Morag. If she said that thing, she lied.’

“ I laughed.

“ ‘Why do you laugh, Morag?’ he asked, in a swift anger.

“ Once more I laughed.

“ ‘Why do you laugh like that, girl?’

“ But I did not answer. ‘Come,’ I said, ‘come with me. I have something to say to you. You can do no good here now. She has taken poison, because of the shame and the sorrow.’

“ ‘Poison!’ he cried, in horror; and also, I could see in the poor, cowardly mind of him, in a sudden sick fear.

“ But when I rose to leave the room he made ready to follow me. I kissed

Morag of the Glen

Muireall for the last time. The man approached, as though to do likewise. I lifted my riding-whip. He bowed his head, with a deep flush on his face, and came out behind me.

“I told the inn-folk that my father would be over in the morning. Then I rode slowly away. Jasper Morgan followed on his horse, a grey stallion that Muireall and I had often ridden, for he was from Teenabrae farm.

“When we left the village it was into a deep darkness. The rain and the wind made the way almost impassable at times. But at last we came to the ford. The water was in spate, and the rushing sound terrified my horse. I dismounted, and fastened Gealcas to a tree. The man did the same.

“‘What is it, Morag?’ he asked in a quiet, steady voice—‘Death?’

“‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Death.’

“Then he suddenly fell forward, and snatched my hand, and begged me to forgive him, swearing that he had loved me and me only, and imploring me to believe him, to love him, to . . . Ah, the *hound!*

“But all I said was this:

“‘Jasper Morgan, soon or late I would kill

Morag of the Glen

you, because of this cruel wrong you did to her. But there is one way: best for *her* . . . best for *me* . . . best for *you*.'

"'What is that?' he said hoarsely, though I think he knew now. The roar of the Gormalt Water filled the night.

"'There is one way. It is the only way . . . Go!'

"He gave a deep, quavering sigh. Then without word he turned, and walked straight into the darkness."

Morag paused here. Then, in answer to my frightened whisper, she added simply:

"They will find his body in the shallows, down by Drumdoon. The spate will carry it there."

After that we lay in silence. The rain had begun to fall again, and slid with a soft, stealthy sound athwart the window. A dull light grew indiscernibly into the room. Then we heard someone move downstairs. In the yard, Angus, the stableman, began to pump water. A cow lowed, and the clattering of hens was audible.

I moved gently from Morag's side. As I rose, Maisie passed beneath the window on her way to the byre. As her wont was, poor wild wildered lass, she was singing fitfully. It

Morag of the Glen

was the same ballad again. But we heard a single verse only.

“For I have killed a man,” she said,
“A better man than you to wed:
I slew him when he clasped my head,
And now he sleepeth with the dead.”

Then the voice was lost in the byre, and in the sweet, familiar lowing of the kine. The new day was come.

THE SIGHT

The "vision," or second-sight, is more common in the Western Isles than in the Highlands; now at least, when all things sacred to the Celtic race, from the ancient language to the degenerate and indeed all but vanished Beltane and Samhain rites, are smiled at by the gentle and mocked by the vulgar. A day will come when men will lament more what is irrevocable than ever a nation mourned for lapsed dominion. It is a bitter, cruel thing that strangers must rule the hearts and brains, as well as the poor fortunes, of the mountaineers and islanders. Yet, in doing their best to thrust Celtic life and speech and thought into the sea, they are working a sore hurt for themselves that they shall discern in the day of adversity. We of the passing race know this thing: that in a day to come the sheep-runs shall not be in the isles and the Highlands only; for we see the forests moving south, and there will be lack, then, not of deer and of sheep, but of hunters and shepherds.

That which follows is only a memento of

The Sight

what was told me last summer by a fisherman of Iona. If I were to write all I have heard about what is called second-sight, it would be a volume and not a few pages I should want. The "sight" has been a reality to me almost from the cradle, for my Highland nurse had the faculty, and I have the memory of more than one of her trances.

There is an old man on the island named Daibhidh (David) Macarthur.¹ It was Ivor McLean, my boatman friend, who took me to him. He is a fine old man, though "heavy" a little—with years, perhaps, for his head is white as the crest of a wave. He is one of the very few of Iona, perhaps, of the two or three at most, who do not speak any English.

"No," he told me, "he had never had the sight himself. Ivor was wrong in saying that he had."

This, I imagine, was shyness, or, rather, that innate reticence of the Celt in all profoundly intimate and spiritual matters; for, from what Ivor told me, I am convinced that old Macarthur had more than once proved himself a seer.

¹ As there are several Macarthurs on Iona, I may say that the old man I allude to was not so named. Out of courtesy I disguise his name, though since the above was written he is no more.

The Sight

But he admitted that his wife had "it."

We were seated on an old upturned boat on the rocky little promontory, where once were first laid the innumerable dead, brought for burial to the sacred soil of Iona. For a time Macarthur spoke slowly about this and that; then, abruptly and without preamble, he told me this:

The Christmas before last, Mary, his wife, had seen a man who was not on the island. "And that is true, by St Martin's Cross," he added.

They were, he said, sitting before the fire, when, after a long silence, he looked up to see his wife staring into the shadow in the ingle. He thought that she was brooding over the barren womb that had been her life-long sorrow, and now in her old age had become a strange and gnawing grief, and so he turned his gaze upon the red coals again.

But suddenly she exclaimed, "*Cait am bheil thu dol?*" (Where are you going?)

He looked up, but saw no one in the room beside themselves.

"What has come to you?" he asked. "What do you see?"

But she took no notice.

"*C'uine tha thu falbh?*" (When are you going?) she muttered, with the same strained

The Sight

voice and frozen eyes. And then, once again, "*C'uire thig thu rithisd?*" (When will you come again?) And with that she bowed her head, and the thin backs of her hands upon her knees were wet with falling tears.

For the fourth of an hour thereafter she would say nothing except moan, "*Tha an amhuinn domhain; tha an amhuinn domhain; fuar, fuar; domhain, domhain!*" (Deep, deep is the river; cold and deep; cold and deep!)

And the man she saw, added Macarthur, was her nephew, Luthais, in Cape Breton, of Nova Scotia, who, as they learned before Easter, was drowned that Christmas-tide. He was the last of his mother's race, and had been the foster-child of Mary.

THE DARK HOUR OF FERGUS

In September of last year, I was ferried across the Sound of Kerrera by an old boatman.

That afternoon I went with my friend, a peasant farmer near the south end of Kerrera, and lay down in the grassy, bouldered wilderness beneath the cliff on which stands the ruin of Gylen Castle. The tide called in a loud insistent whisper, rising to a hoarse gurgle, from the Sound. The breeze that came from the mountains of Mull was honey-sweet with heather smell. The bleating of the ewes and lambs, the screaming of a few gulls—nothing else was audible. At times, it is true, like a deep sigh, the suspiration of the open sea rose and fell among the islands. Faint echoes of that sigh came round Gylen headland and up the Kyle. It was an hour wherein to dream of the sons of Morven, who had landed here often, long before the ancient stronghold was built; of Fionn and the Féinn; of the coming

The Dark Hour of Fergus

and going of Ossian in his blind old age; of beautiful Malvina; of the galleys of the Fomorians; of the songs and the singers and all the beautiful things of "the old ancient long ago."

But the tale that I heard from my friend was this.

You know that my mother's people are Skye folk. It was from the mother of my mother that I heard what you call the Incantation of the Spirit, though I never heard it called anything but old Elsie's *Sian*. She lived near the Hart o' Corry. You know the part? Ay, true, it is wild land—wild even for the wilderness o' Skye. Old mother Elsie had "the sight" at times, and whenever she wished she could find out the lines o' life. It was magic, they say. Who am I to know? This is true, she knew much that no one else knew. When my mother's cousin, Fergus MacEwan, who was mate of a sloop that sailed between Stornoway and Ardrossan, came to see her—and that was in the year before my mother was married, and when she was courted by Fergus, though she was never for giving her life to him, for even then she loved my father, poor fisherman of Ulva though he was (though heir, through his

The Dark Hour of Fergus

father's brother, to his crofter-farm on Kerrera here)—when Fergus came to see her, because of the gloom that was upon his spirit, she foretold all. At first she could "see" poorly. But one wild afternoon, when the Cuchullins were black with cloud-smoke, she bade him meet her in that lonely savage glen they call the Loat o' Corry. He was loath to go, for he feared the place. But he went. He told all to my mother before he went away next dawn, with the heart in him broken, and his hope as dead as a herring in a net.

Mother Elsie came to him out of the dusk in that wuthering place just like a drifting mist, as he said. She gave him no greeting, but was by his side in silence. Before he knew what she was doing she had the soles of her feet upon his, and her hands folding his, and her eyes burning against his like hot coals against ash. He felt shudders come over him, and a wind blew up and down his back; and he grew giddy, and heard the roaring of the tide in his ears. Then he was quiet. Her voice was very far away when she said this thing, but he remembered every word of it:

By that which dwells within thee,
By the lamps that shine upon me,
By the white light I see litten
From the brain now sleeping stilly,

The Dark Hour of Fergus

By the silence in the hollows,
By the wind that slow subsideth,
By the life-tide slowly ebbing,
By the death-tide slowly rising,
By the slowly waning warmth,
By the chill that slowly groweth,
By the dusk that slowly creepeth,
By the darkness near thee,
By the darkness round thee,
By the darkness o'er thee—
O'er thee, round thee, on thee—
By the one that standeth
At thy side and waiteth
Dumb and deaf and blindly,
By the one that moveth,
Bendeth, riseth, watcheth,
By the dim Grave Spell upon thee,
By the Silence thou has wedded. . . .
 May the way thy feet are treading,
 May the tangled lines now crookèd
 Clear as moonlight lie before me.

Oh! oh! ochrone, ochrone! green the branches bonnie:
Oh! oh! ochrone, ochrone! red the blood-drop berries:
Achrone, arone, arone, arone, I see the green-clad Lady,
She walks the road that's wet with tears, with rustling
sorrows shady. . . .
Oh! oh! mo ghraidh.

Then it was that a great calm came upon Fergus, though he felt like a drowned man, or as one who stood by his own body, but speechless, and feeling no blowing of wind through his shadow-frame.

The Dark Hour of Fergus

For, indeed, though the body lived, he was already of the company of the silent. What was that *caiodh*, that wailing lamentation, sad as the *Cumha fir Arais*, which followed Elsie's incantation, her spell upon "the way" before him, that it and all the trailed lines of this life should be clear as moonlight before her? "*Oh! oh! ohrone, ochrone! red the blood-drop berries*"; did not these mean no fruit of the quicken-tree, but the falling drops from the maimed tree that was himself? And was not the green-clad lady, she who comes singing low, the sprouting of the green grass that is the hair of the earth? And was not the road, gleaming wet with ruts and pools all of tears, and overhung by dark rustling plumes of sorrow, the road that the soul traverses in the dark hour? And did not all this mean that the Grave Spell was already upon him, and that the Silence was to be his?¹

But what thing it was she saw, Elsie would not say. Darkly she dreamed awhile, then

¹ (1) The *Cumha fir Arais* pronounce *Küv'ah feer Arooss*) means the lament of the Man of Aros—*i.e.* the chieftain. Aros Castle, on the great island of Mull, overlooking the Sound, was one of the strongholds of Macdonald, Lord of the Isles. (2) The quicken (rowan, mountain-ash, and other names) is a sacred tree with the Celtic peoples,

The Dark Hour of Fergus

leaned forward and kissed his breast. He felt the sob in her heart throb into his.

Dazed, and knowing that she had seen more than she had dreamed of seeing, and that his hour was striding over the rocky wilderness of that wild Isle of Skye, he did not know she was gone, till a shuddering fear of the silence and the gloom told him he was alone.

Coll MacColl (he that was my Kerrera friend) stopped here, just as a breeze will suddenly stop in a corrie so that the rowan berries on the side of a quicken will sway this way and that, while the long, thin leaves on the other will be as still as the stones underneath, where their shadows sleep.

I asked him at last if Elsie's second-sight had proved true. He looked at me for a moment, as though vaguely surprised I should ask so foolish a thing.

and its branches can either avert or compel supernatural influences. (3) The green-clad Lady is the Cailleach, the Siren of the Hill-Sides, to see whom portends death or disaster. When she is heard singing, that portends death soon for the hearer. The grass is that which grows quick and green above the dead. The dark hour is the hour of death—*i.e.* the first hour after death.

The Dark Hour of Fergus

No sleep came to Fergus that night, he resumed, quietly, as though no other words were needed, and at daybreak he rose and left the cot of his kinsman, Andrew MacEwan. In the grey dawn he saw my mother, and told her all. Then she wished him farewell, and bade him come again when next the *Sunbeam* should be sailing to Portree, or other port in Skye; for she did not believe that her mother had seen speedy death, or death at all, but perhaps only a time of sorrow, and even that she had done this thing to send Fergus away, for she too had her eyes on Robert MacColl, that was my father.

“And so you will come again, Fergus, my friend,” she said; and added, “and perhaps then you will be telling me of a *Sunbeam* ashore, as well as that you sail from Ardrissan to the far-away islands!”

He stared at her as one who hears ill. Then he took her hand in his, and let it go suddenly again. With one arm he rubbed the rough Uist cap he held in his left hand; then he brushed off the wet mist that was grey on his thick, black beard.

“You are not well, Fearghas-mo-charaid,” my mother said, and gently. When she saw the staring pain in his eyes, she added, with a low sob, “My heart is sore for you!”

The Dark Hour of Fergus

With that he turned away, and she saw him no more that day or any day of all the days to come.

“And what thing happened, Coll?”

“They kept it from her, and she did not know it for long. It was this: Fergus MacEwan did not sail far that morning. He was ill, he said, and was put ashore. That night Aulay Macaulay saw him moving about in that frightful place of the Storr Rock, moaning and muttering. He would have spoken to him, but he saw him begin to leap about the pinnacled rocks like a goat, and at last run up to The Old Man of Storr and beat it with his clinched fists, blaspheming with wild words; and he feared Fergus was mad, and he slipped from shadow to shadow, till he fled openly. But in the morning Aulay and his brother Finlay went back to look for Fergus. At first they thought he had been drowned, or had fallen into one of the fissures. But from a *balachan*, a ‘bit laddie,’ as they would call him in the town over the way [Oban], they heard that a man had pushed off that morning in John Macpherson’s boat, that lay about a mile and a half from the Storr, and had sailed north along the coast.

“Well, it was three days before he was found—stone-dead: If you know the Quiraing

The Dark Hour of Fergus

you will know the great Needle Rock. Only a bird can climb it, as the saying goes. Half-way up, Finlay Macaulay and a man of the neighbourhood saw the body o' Fergus as though it were glued to the rock. It was windless weather, or he would have been blown away like a drifted leaf. They had to jerk the body down with net-poles. God save us the dark hour of Fergus, that died like a wild beast!"

THE HILLS OF RUEL

One night Eilidh and Isla and I were sitting before a fire of pine logs blazing upon peats, and listening to the snow as it whispered against the walls of the house. The wind crying in the glen, and the tumult of the hill-stream in spate, were behind the white confused rumour of the snow.

Eilidh was singing low to herself, and Isla was watching her. I could not look long at him, because of the welling upward of the tears that were in my heart. I know not why they were there.

At last, after a pause wherein each sat intent listening to the disarray without, Eilidh's sweet thrilling voice slid through the silence:

“Over the hills and far away,”
That is the tune I heard one day.
Oh that I too might hear the cruel
Honey-sweet folk of the Hills of Ruel.

I saw a shadow go into Isla's eyes. So I stirred and spoke to my cousin.

“You, Isla, who were born on the Hills of

The Hills of Ruel

Ruel, should sure have seen something of the honey-sweet folk, as they are called in Eilidh's song."

He did not answer straightway, and I saw Eilidh furtively glance at him.

"I will tell you a story," he said at last simply.

Long, long ago there was a beautiful woman, and her name was Etain, and she was loved by a man. I am not for remembering the name of that man, for it is a story of the far-off days: but he was a prince. I will call him Art, and mayhap he was a son of that Art, the Solitary who was wont to hear the songs of the hidden people and to see the moonshine dancers.

This Art loved Etain, and she him. So one day he took her to his dún, and she was his wife. But, and this was an ill thing for one like Art, who was a poet and dreamer, he loved this woman overmuch. She held his life in the hollow of her hand. Nevertheless she loved him truly, after her kind: and for him, blind with the Dream against his eyes, all might have been well, but for one thing. For Art, who was no coward, feared one hazard, and that was death: not his own death, and not even the death of Etain, but death. He loved

The Hills of Ruel

Etain beyond the narrow frontiers of life : and at that indrawing shadow he stood appalled.

One day, when his longing was great upon him, he went out alone upon the Hills of Ruel. There a man met him, a stranger, comely beyond all men he had seen, with dark eyes of dream, and a shadowy smile.

“And so,” he said, “and so, Art the Dreamer, thou art eager to know what way thou mayest meet Etain, in that hour when the shadow of the Shadow is upon thee?”

“Even so; though I know neither thee nor the way by which my name is known unto thee.”

“Oh, for sure I am only a wandering singer. But, now that we are met, I will sing to you, Art my lord.”

Art looked at him frowningly. This man who called him lord spake with heedless sovereignty.

Then, of a sudden, song eddied off the lips of the man, the air of it marvellous light and of a haunting strangeness : and the words were those that Eilidh there sang by the fire.

Through the dusk of silence which that song made in his brain, Art saw the stranger draw from the fawnskin, slung round his shoulders and held by a gold torque, a reed. The man played upon it.

The Hills of Ruel

While he played, there was a stirring on the Hills of Ruel. All the green folk were there. They sang.

Art listened to their honey-sweet song, and grew drowsy with the joy and peace of it. And one there was who sang of deathless life; and Art, murmuring the name of Etain, fell asleep.

He was an old, old man when he awoke, and the grey hair that lay down the side of his face was damp with unremembered tears. But, not knowing this, he rose and cried "Etain," "Etain!"

When he reached his *dûn* there was no Etain there. He sat down by old ashes, where the wind blew through a chink, and pondered. An old man entered at dusk.

"Where is Etain?" Art asked.

"Etain, the wife of Midir?"

"No; Etain, the wife of Art."

The old man mumbled through his open jaws:

"All these years since I was young, Etain the wife of Art has been Etain the wife of Midir."

"And who is Midir?"

"Midir is the King of the World; he, they say, who makes sand of women's hearts and dust of men's hopes."

The Hills of Ruel

“And I have dreamed but an idle dream?” Art cried, with his heart breaking in a sob within him.

“Ay, for if Art you be, you have been dreaming a long dream upon the Hills of Ruel.”

But when Art, old now and weak, turned to go back to the honey-sweet folk upon the Hills of Ruel, so that he might dream his dream again, he heard Midir laughing, and he died.

“And that is all,” ended Isla abruptly, looking neither at Eilidh nor at me, and staring into the flame of the peats.

But Eilidh smiled no more to herself that night, and no more sang below her breath.

THE ARCHER

The man who told me this thing was Coll McColl, an islander of Barra, in the Southern Hebrides. He spoke in the Gaelic, and it was while he was mending his net; and by the same token I thought at the time that his words were like herring-fry in that net, some going clean through, and others sticking fast by the gills. So I do not give it exactly as I heard it, but in substance as Coll gave it.

He is dead now, and has perhaps seen the Archer. Coll was a poet, and the island-folk said he was mad: but this was only because he loved beyond the reach of his fate.

There were two men who loved one woman. It is of no mere girl with the fair looks upon her I am speaking, but of a woman, that can put the spell over two men. The name of the woman was Silis: the names of the men were Seumas and Ian.

Both men were young; both were of the strong, silent, island-race, but Ian Macleod

The Archer

was the taller. He had, too, the kiss of Dermid on his brow, the fire of Angus in his heart, and was a poet.

Silis was the wife of Seumas. So Seumas had his home, for her breast was his pillow when he willed it: and he had her voice for daily music: and his eyes had never any thirst, for they could drink of her beauty by day and by night. But Ian had no home. He saw his home afar off, and his joy and his strength failed, because the shining lights of it were not for him.

One night the two men were upon the water. It was a dead calm, and the nets had been laid. There was no moon at all, and only a star or two up in the black corner of the sky. The sea had wandering flames in it: and when the big jellyfish floated by, they were like the tide-lamps that some say the dead bear on their drowned faces.

“Some day I may be telling you a strange thing, Seumas,” said Ian, after the long silence there had been since the last net had sent a little cloud of sparkles up from the gulfs.

“Ay?” said Seumas, taking his pipe from his mouth, and looking at the spire of smoke rising just forward o’ the mast. The water slipped by, soft and slow. It was only the

The Archer

tide feeling its way up the sea-loch, for there was not a breath of wind. Here and there were dusky shadows: the boats of the fishermen of Inchghunnais. Each carried a red light, and in some were green lanterns slung midway up the mast.

No other word was said for a long time.

“And I’m wondering,” said Ian at last: “I’m wondering what you’ll think of that story.”

Seumas made no answer to that. He smoked, and stared down into the dark water.

After a time he rose, and leaned against the mast. Though there was no light of either moon or lamp, he put his hand above his eyes, as his wont was.

“I’m thinking the mackerel will be coming this way to-night. This is the third time I’ve heard the snoring of the pollack . . . away yonder, beyond Peter Macallum’s boat.”

“Well, Seumas, I’ll sleep a bit. I had only the outside of a sleep last night.”

With that Ian knocked the ash out of his pipe, and lay overagainst a pile of rope, and shut his eyes, and did not sleep at all because of the sick dull pain of the homeless man he was—home, home, home, and Silis the name of it.

The Archer

When, an hour or more later, he grew stiff he moved, and opened his eyes. His mate was sitting at the helm, but the light in his pipe was out, though he held the pipe in his mouth, and his eyes were wide staring open.

"I would not be telling me that story, Ian," he said.

Ian answered nothing, but shifted back to where he was before, for all his cramped leg. He closed his eyes again.

At the full of the tide, in the deep dark hour before the false dawn, as the first glimmer is called, the glimmer that comes and goes, both men got up, and moved about, stamping their feet. Each lit his pipe, and the smoke hung long in little greyish puffs, so dead-still was it.

On the *Brudhèarg*, John Macalpine's boat, young Neil Macalpine sang. The two men on the *Eala* could hear his singing. It was one of the strange songs of Ian Mòr.

O, she will have the deep dark heart, for all her face
is fair,
As deep and dark as though beneath the shadow of
her hair:
For in her hair a spirit dwells that no white spirit is,
And hell is in the hopeless heaven of that lost spirit's
kiss.

The Archer

She has two men within the palm, the hollow of her hand:
She takes their souls and blows them forth as idle drifted sand:
And one falls back upon her breast that is his quiet home,
And one goes out into the night and is as wind-blown foam.

Seumas leaned against the tiller of the *Eala*, and looked at Ian. He saw a shadow on his face. With his right foot the man tapped against a loose spar that was on the starboard deck.

When the singer ceased, Ian raised his arm and shook menacingly his clenched fist, over across the water to where the *Brudhearg* lay.

There were words on his lips, but they died away when Neil Macalpine broke into a love song, "Mo nighean donn."

"Can you be telling me, Ian," said Seumas, "who was the man that made that song about the homeless man?"

"Ian Mòr."

"Ian Mòr of the Hills?"

"Ay."

"They say he had the shadow upon him?"

"Well, what then?"

"Was it because of love?"

It was because of love."

The Archer

"Did the woman love him?"

"Ay."

"Did she go to him?"

"No."

"Was that why he had the mind-dark?"

"Ay."

"But he loved her, and she loved him?"

"He loved her, and she loved him."

For a time Seumas kept silence. Then he spoke again.

"She was the wife of another man?"

"Ay; she was the wife of another man."

"Did *he* love her?"

"Yes, for sure."

"Did *she* love *him*?"

"Yes . . . yes."

"Whom, then, did she love? For a woman can love one man only."

"She loved both."

"That is not a possible thing: not the one deep love. It is a lie, Ian Macleod."

"Yes, it is a lie, Seumas Maclean."

"Which man did she love?"

Ian slowly shook the ash from his pipe, and looked for a second or two at a momentary quiver in the sky in the north-east.

"The dawn will be here soon now, Seumas."

"Ay. I was asking you, Ian, which man did she love?"

The Archer

"Sure she loved the man who gave her the ring."

"Which man did she love?"

"O for sure, man, you're asking me just like the lawyer who has the trials away at Balliemore on the mainland yonder."

"Well, I'll tell you that thing myself, Ian Macleod, if you'll tell me the name of the woman."

"I am not knowing the name."

"Was it Mary . . . or Jessie . . . or mayhap was it Silis, now?"

"I am not knowing the name."

"Well, well, it might be Silis, then?"

"Ay, for sure it might be Silis. As well Silis as any other."

"And what would the name of the other man be?"

"What man?"

"The man whose ring she wore?"

"I am not remembering that name."

"Well, now, would it be Padruig, or mayhap Ivor, or . . . or . . . perhaps, now, Seumas?"

"Ay, it might be that."

"Seumas?"

"Ay, as well that as any other."

"And what was the end?"

"The end o' what?"

The Archer

“The end of that loving?”

Ian Macleod gave a low laugh. Then he stooped to pick up the pipe he had dropped. Suddenly he rose without touching it. He put his heel on the warm clay, and crushed it.

“That is the end of that kind of loving,” he said. He laughed low again as he said that.

Seumas leaned and picked up the trodden fragments.

“They’re warm still, Macleod.”

“Are they?” Ian cried at that, his eyes with a red light coming into the blue: “then they will go where the man in the song went, the man who sought his home for ever and ever and never came any nearer than into the shine of the window-lamps.”

With that he threw the pieces into the dark water that was already growing ashy-grey.

“’Tis a sure cure, that, Seumas Maclean.”

“Ay, so they say, . . . and so, so: ay, as you were saying, Ian Mòr went into the shadow because of that home he could not win?”

“So they say. And now we’ll take the nets. ’Tis a heavy net that comes out black, as the sayin’ is. They’re heavy for sure, after this still night, an’ the wind southerly, an’ the pol-lack this way an’ that.”

“Well, now, that’s strange.”

“What is strange, Seumas Maclean?”

The Archer

“ That you should say that thing.”

“ And for why that?”

“ Oh, just this. Silis had a dream the other night, she had. She dreamed she saw you standing alone on the *Eala*: and you were hauling hard a heavy net, so that the sweat ran down your face. And your face was dead-white pale, she said. An’ you hauled an’ you hauled. An’ someone beside you that she couldn’t see laughed an’ laughed: an’ . . .”

With a stifled oath, Ian broke in upon the speaker’s words:

“ Why, man alive, you said he, the man, myself it is, was alone on the *Eala*.”

“ Well, Silis saw no one but yourself, Ian Macleod.”

“ But she heard some one beside me laughing an’ laughing.”

“ So she said. And you were dead-white, she said: with the sweat pouring down you. An’ you pulled an’ you pulled. Then you looked up at her and said: ‘ *It’s a heavy net that comes up black, as the sayin’ is.*’ ”

Ian Macleod made no answer to that, but slowly began to haul at the nets. A swift moving light slid hither and thither well away to the north-east. The sea greyed. A new, poignant, salt smell came up from the waves. Sail’after sail of the smacks ceased to be a

The Archer

blur in the dark: each lifted a brown shadowy wing against a dusk through which a flood of myriad drops of light steadily oozed.

Now from this boat, now from that, hoarse cries resounded.

The *Mairi Ban* swung slowly round before the faint dawn-wind, and lifted her bow homeward with a little slapping splash. The *Maggie*, the *Trilleachan*, the *Eilid*, the *Jessie*, and the *Mairi Donn* followed one by one.

In silence the two men on the *Eala* hauled in their nets. The herring made a sheet of shifting silver as they lay in the hold. As the dawn lightened, the quivering silver mass sparkled. The decks were mailed with glittering scales: these, too, gleamed upon the legs, arms, and hands of the two fishermen.

"Well, that's done!" exclaimed Seumas at last. "Up with the helm, Ian, and let us make for home."

The *Eala* forged ahead rapidly when once the sail had its bellyful of wind. She passed the *Tern*, then the *Jessie Macalpine*, caught up the big, lumbering *Maggie*, and went rippling and rushing along the wake of the *Eilid*, the lightest of the Inchghunnais boats.

Off shore, the steamer *Osprey* met the smacks, and took the herring away, cran by cran. Long before her screw made a yeast

The Archer

of foam athwart the black-green inshore water, the *Eala* was in the little haven and had her nose in the shingle at Craigard point.

In silence Seumas and Ian walked by the rock-path to the isolated cottage where the Macleans lived. The swallows were flitting hither and thither in front of its low, white-washed wall, like flying shuttles against a silent loom. The luminous, pale gold of a rainy dawn lit the whiteness of a corpse. Suddenly Ian stopped.

“Will you be telling me now, Seumas, which man it was that she loved?”

Macleod did not look at the speaker, though he stopped too. He stared at the white cottage, and at the little square window with the geranium-pot on the lintel.

But while he hesitated, Ian Macleod turned away, and walked swiftly across the wet bracken and bog-myrtle till he disappeared over Cnoc-na-Hurich, on the hidden slope of which his own cottage stood amid a wilderness of whins.

Seumas watched him till he was out of sight. It was then only that he answered the question.

“I’m thinking,” he muttered slowly, “I’m thinking she loved Ian Mòr.”

“Yes,” he muttered again later, as he took

The Archer

off his sea-soaked clothes, and lay down on the bed in the kitchen, whence he could see into the little room where Silis was in a profound sleep: "Yes, I'm thinking she loved Ian Mòr."

He did not sleep at all, for all his weariness.

When the sunlight streamed in across the red sandstone floor, and crept toward his wife's bed, he rose softly and looked at her. He did not need to stoop when he entered the room, as Ian Macleod would have had to do.

He looked at Silis a long time. Her shadowy hair was all about her face. She had never seemed to him more beautiful. Well was she called "Silis the Fawn" in the poem that some one had made about her.

The poem that some one had made about her? . . . yes, for sure, how could he be forgetting who it was. Was it not Ian, and he a poet, too, another Ian Mòr they said.

"Another Ian Mòr." As he repeated the words below his breath, he bent over his wife. Her white breast rose and fell, the way a moonbeam does in moving water.

Then he knelt. When he took the slim white hand in his she did not wake. It closed lovingly upon his own.

A smile slowly came and went upon the

The Archer

dreaming face—ah, lovely, white, dreaming face, with the hidden starry eyes. There was a soft flush, and a parting of the lips. The half-covered bosom rose and fell as with some groundswell from the beating heart.

“*Silis*,” he whispered. “*Silis . . . Silis . . .*”

She smiled. He leaned close above her lips.

“Ah, heart o’ me,” she whispered, “O Ian; Ian, mo rùn, moghray, Ian, Ian, Ian!”

Seumas drew back. He too was like the man in her dream, for it was dead-white he was, with the sweat in great beads upon his face.

He made no noise as he went back to the hearthside, and took his wet clothes from where he had hung them before the smooored peats, and put them on again.

Then he went out.

It was a long walk to Ian Macleod’s cottage that few-score yards: a long, long walk.

When Seumas stood on the wet grass round the flagstones he saw that the door was ajar. Ian had not lain down. He had taken his ash-lute, and was alternately playing and singing low to himself.

Macleod went close up to the wall, and listened. At first he could hear no more than snatches of songs.

The Archer

Then suddenly the man within put down
his ash-lute, and stirred. In a loud vibrant
voice he sang:

O far away upon the hills at the lighting of the dawn
I saw a stirring in the fern and out there leapt a
fawn:

And O my heart was up at that and like a wind it
blew

Till its shadow hovered o'er the fawn as 'mid the
fern it flew.

And *Silis! Silis! Silis!* was the wind-song on the hill,
And *Silis! Silis! Silis!* did the echoing corries fill:
My hunting heart was glad indeed, at the lighting of
the dawn,

For O it was the hunting then of my bonnie, bonnie
Fawn!

For some moments there was dead silence.
Then a heavy sigh came from within the cot-
tage.

Seumas Maclean at last made a step for-
ward, and before his shadow fell across the
doorway Ian breathed a few melancholy notes
and began a slow, wailing song:

O heart that is breaking,
Breaking, breaking,
O for the home that I canna, canna win:
O the weary aching,
The weary, weary aching
To be in the home that I canna, canna win!

The Archer

Seumas' face was white and tired. It is weary work with the herring, no doubt.

He lifted a white stone and rapped loudly on the door. Ian came out, and looked at him. The singer smiled, though that smiling had no light in it. It was dark as a dark wave it was.

"Well?" he said.

"May I come in?"

"Come in, and welcome. And what will you be wanting, Seumas Maclean?"

"Sure, it's too late to sleep, an' I'm thinking I would like to hear now that story you were to tell me."

The man gave no answer to that. Each looked at the other with luminous, unwinking eyes.

"It will not be a fair thing," said Ian slowly, at last. "It will not be a fair thing: for I am bigger and stronger."

"There is another way, Ian Macleod."

"Ay?"

"That you or I go to her, and tell her all, and then at the last say: 'Come with me, or stay with him.'"

"So be it."

So there and then they drew for chance. The gaining of that hazard was with Seumas Maclean.

The Archer

Without a word Ian turned and went into the house. There he took his feadan, and played low to himself, staring into the red heart of the smouldering peats. He neither smiled nor frowned; once only he smiled, and that was when Seumas came back, and said *Come*.

So the two walked in silence across the dewy grass. There was a loud calling of skuas and terns, and the raucous laughing cry of the great herring-gull, upon the weedy shore of Craigard. The tide bubbled and oozed through the wilderness of wrack. Farther off there were the cackling of hens, the lowing of restless kye, and the bleating of the sheep on the slopes of Melmonach. A shrewd salt air tingled in the nostrils of the two men.

At the closed door Seumas made a sign of silence. Then he unfastened the latch, and entered.

“Silis,” he said in a low voice, but clear.

“Silis, I’ve come back again. Dry your tears, my lass, and tell me once again—for I’m dying to hear the blessed truth once again—tell me once again if it’s me you love best, or Ian Macleod.”

“I have told you, Seumas.”

Without, Ian heard her words and drew closer.

The Archer

“And it is a true thing that you love me best, and that since the choice between him and me has come, you choose me?”

“It is a true thing.”

A shadow fell across the room. Ian Macleod stood in the doorway.

Silis turned the white, beautiful face of her, and looked at the man. He smiled. She was no coward, his Silis: that was the thought which sang in his mind.

“Is—it—a—true—thing, Silis?” he asked slowly.

She looked at Seumas, then at Ian, then back at her husband.

“It might kill Seumas,” she muttered below her breath, so that neither heard her: “it might kill him,” she repeated.

Then, with a swift turn of her eyes, she spoke.

“Yes, it is a true thing, Ian. I abide by Seumas.”

That was all.

She was conscious of the wave of relief that went into Seumas' face. She saw the rising of a dark, strange tide in the eyes of Ian.

He stared at her. Perhaps he did not hear? Perhaps he was dreaming still? He was a dreamer, a poet: perhaps he could not understand.

The Archer

“*A ghraidh mo chridhe*—dear love of my heart,” he whispered hoarsely.

But Silis was frozen.

Ian stood awhile, strangely tremulous. She could see his nerves quivering below his clothes. He was a big, strong giant of a lover: but he trembled now like a fawn himself, she thought. His blue eyes were suddenly grown cloudy and dim. Then the deadly frost of her lie slew that in him without which life is nothing.

Ian turned. He stumbled through the blinding white light beyond the door. In his ears the faint lapsing noise of the tide stormed in the doorway. Seumas did not look at Silis. They listened, till they no more heard the sound of Ian's feet across the shingle that led to the haven.

He was quite white and still when they found him three days later. He seemed a giant of a man as he lay, face upward, among the green flags by the water-edge. The chill starlight of three nights had got into the quiet of his face.

That night, resumed Coll McColl, after a long pause—that night he, Coll, was walking in the moonlight across the hither slope of Melmonach.

The Archer

He stood under a rowan-tree, and watched a fawn leaping wildly through the fern. While he watched, amazed, he saw a tall, shadowy woman pass by. She stopped, and drew a great bow she carried, and shot an arrow. It went through the air with a sharp whistling sound—just like *Silis—Silis—Silis*, Coll said, to give me an idea of it.

The arrow went right through the fawn.

But here was a strange thing. The fawn leapt away sobbing into the night: while its heart suspended, arrow-pierced, from the white stem of a silver birch.

“And to this day,” said Coll at the last, “I am not for knowing who that archer was, or who that fawn. You think it was these two who loved? Well, ’tis Himself knows. But I have this thought of my thinking: that it was only a vision I saw, and that the fawn was the poor suffering heart of Love, and that the Archer was the great Shadowy Archer that hunts among the stars. For in the dark of the morrow after that night I was on Cnoc-na-Hurich, and I saw a woman there shooting arrow after arrow against the stars. At dawn she rose and passed away, like smoke, beyond those pale wandering fires.

THE BIRDEEN

Some other time I will tell the story of Isla and Morag McIan: Isla that was the foster-brother and chief friend of Ian McIan the mountain-poet, known as Ian of the Hills, or simply as Ian Mòr, because of his great height and the tireless strength that was his. Of Morag, too, there is a story of the Straths, sweet as honey of the heather, and glad as the breeze that, blowing across it in summer, waves the purple into white-o'-the-wind and sea-change amethyst.

Isla was seven years older than Ian Mòr, and had been seven years married to Morag, when the sorrow of their friend's life came upon him. Of that matter I speak elsewhere.

They were happy, Isla and Morag. Though both were of Strachurmore of Loch Fyne, they lived at a small hill-farm on the west side of the upper fjord of Loch Long, and within sight of Arrochar, where it sits among its mountains. They could not see the fantastic outline of "The Cobbler," because of a near hill that shut them off, though from the loch

The Birdeen

it was visible and almost upon them. But they could watch the mists on Ben Arthur and Ben Maiseach, and when a flying drift of mackerel-sky spread upward from Ben Lomond, that was but a few miles eastward as the crow flies, they could tell of the good weather that was sure.

Before the end of the first year of their marriage, deep happiness came to them. "The Birdeen" was their noon of joy. When the child came, Morag had one regret only, that a boy was not hers, for she longed to see Isla in the child that was his. But Isla was glad, for now he had two dreams in his life: Morag whom he loved more and more, and the little one whom she had borne to him, and was for him a mystery and joy against the dark hours of the dark days that must be.

They named her Eilidh. One night, in front of the peats, and before her time was come, Morag, sitting with Isla and Ian Mòr, dreamed of the birthing. It was dark, save for the warm redness of the peat-glow. There was no other light, and in the dusky corners obscure velvety things that we call shadows moved and had their own life and were glad. Outside, the hill-wind was still at last, after a long wandering moaning that had not ceased since its westering, for, like a wailing hound,

The Birdeen

it had followed the sun all day. A soft rain fell. The sound of it was for peace.

Isla sat forward, his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees. He was dreaming, too. "Morag," "Isla," deep love, deep mystery, the child that was already here, and would soon be against the breast; these were the circuit of his thoughts. Sure, Morag, sweet and dear as she was, was now more dear, more sweet. "Green life to her," he murmured below his breath, "and in her heart, joy by day and peace by night."

Ian sat in the shadow of the ingle, and looked now at one and now at the other, and then mayhap into the peat-flame or among the shadows. He saw what he saw. Who knows what is in a poet's mind? The echo of the wind that was gone was there, and the sound of the rain and the movement and colour of the fire, and something out of the earth and sea and sky, and great pitifulness and tenderness for women and children, and love of men and of birds and beasts, and of the green lives that were to him not less wonderful and intimate. And Ian, thinking, knew that the thoughts of Isla and Morag were drifting through his mind too; so that he smiled with his eyes because of the longing and joy in the life of the man, his friend; and looked

The Birdeen

through a mist of unshed tears at Morag, because of the other longing that shone in her eyes, and of the thinness of the hands now, and of the coming and going of the breath like a bird tired after a long flight. He was troubled, too, with the fear and the wonder that came to him out of the hidden glooms of her soul.

It was Ian who broke the stillness, though for sure his low words were parts of the peat-rustle and the dripping rain and the wash of the sea-loch, where it twisted like a black adder among the hills, and was now quick with the tide.

“But if the birdeen be after you, Morag, and not after Isla, what will you be for calling it?”

Morag started, glanced at him with her flame-lit eyes, and flushed. Then, with a low laugh, her whispered answer came.

“Now it is a true thing, Ian, that you are a wizard. Isla has often said that you can hear the wooing of the trees and the flowers, but sure I’m thinking you could hear the very stones speak, or at least know what is in their hearts. How did you guess that was the thought I was having?”

“It was for the knowing, lassikin.”

“Ian, it is a wife you should have, and a

The Birdeen

child upon your knee to put its lips against yours, and to make your heart melt because of its little wandering hands."

Ian made no sign, though his pulse leaped, for this was ever the longing that lay waiting behind heart and brain, and thrilled each along the wise, knowing nerves—our wise nerves that were attuned long, long ago, and play to us a march against the light, or down into the dark, and we unwitting, and not knowing the ancient rune of the heritage that the blood sings, an ancient, ancient song. Who plays the tune to which our dancing feet are led? It is behind the mist, that antique strain to which the hills rose in flame and marl, and froze slowly into granite silence, and to which the soul of man crept from the things of the slime to the palaces of the brain. It is for the hearing, that; in the shells of the human. Who knows the undersong of the tides in the obscure avenues of the sea? Who knows the immemorial tidal-murmur along the nerves—along the nerves even of a new-born child?

Seeing that he was silent, Morag added: "Ay, Ian dear, it is a wife and a child you must have. Sure no man that has all the loving little names you give to us can do without us!"

"Well, well, Morag-aghray, the hour waits,

The Birdeen

as they say out in the isles. But you have not given me the answer to what I asked?"

"And it is no answer that I have. Isla!—Isla, if a girl it is to be, you would be for liking the little one to be called Morag, because of me; but that I would not like; no, no, I would not. Is it forgetting, you are, what old Muim' Mary said, that a third Morag in line, like a third Seumas, would be born in the shadow, would have the gloom?"

"For sure, *muirnean*; it is not you or I that would forget that thing. Well, since there's Morag that was your mother, and Morag, that is you, there can be no third. But it is the same with Muireall that was the name of my mother and of the mother before her. See here now, dear, let Ian have the naming, if a girl it be—for all three of us know that, if a boy it is, his name will be Ian. So now, *mo-charaid*, what is the name that will be upon the wean?"

"*Wean*," repeated Ian, puzzled for a moment because of the unfamiliar word in the Gaelic, "ah, sure, yes: well, but it is Morag who knows best."

"No, no, Ian. The naming is to be with you. What names of women do you love best?"

"Morag."

The Birdeen

“ Ah, you know well that is not a true thing, but only a saying for the saying. Tell me true ; what name do you love best ? ”

“ Mona I like, and Lora, and Silis too ; and of the old, old names, it's Brigid I am loving, and, too, Dearduil (*Darthula*) and Malmhin (*Malveen*) ; but of all names dear to me, and sweet in my ears, it is Eilidh (*Ei-lee*). ”

And so it was. When, in the third week after that night, the child was born, and a woman-child at that, it was called Eilidh. But the first thing that Ian said when he entered the house after the birthing was :

“ How is the birdeen ? ”

And from that day Eilidh was “ the Birdeen,” oftenest—even with Isla and Morag.

Of the many songs that Ian made to Eilidh here is one :

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, dear to me, dear and sweet,
In dreams I am hearing the noise of your little running feet—
The noise of your running feet that like the sea-hoofs beat
A music by day and night, Eilidh, on the sands of my heart, my Sweet!

Eilidh, blue i' the eyes, as all babe-children are,
And white as the canna that blows with the hill-breast wind afar,

The Birdeen

Whose is the light in thine eyes, the light of a star,
a star
That sitteth supreme where the starry lights of
heaven a glory are!
Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, put off your wee hands from
the heart o' me,
It is pain they are making there, where no more pain
should be;
For little running feet, an' wee white hands, an'
croodlin, as of the sea,
Bring tears to my eyes, Eilidh, tears, tears, out of
the heart o' me—

Mo lennav-a-chree,
Mo lennav-a-chree!

This was for himself, and because of what was in his heart. But he made songs to the Birdeen herself. Some were as simple-mysterious as a wayside flower; others were strange, and with a note in them that all who know the Songs of Ian will recognise. Here is one:

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,
Who is it swinging you to and fro,
With a long low swing and a sweet low croon,
And the loving words of the mother's rune?

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,
Who is it swinging you to and fro?
I'm thinking it is an angel fair,
The Angel that looks on the gulf from the lowest stair
And swings the green world upward by its leagues of
sunshine-hair.

The Birdeen

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,
Who is it swings you and the Angel to and fro?
It is He whose faintest thought is a world afar,
It is He whose wish is a leaping seven-moon'd star,
It is He, Lennavan-mo,
To whom you and I and all things flow.

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,
It is only a little wee lass you are, Eilidh-mo-chree
But as this wee blossom has roots in the depths of the
sky,
So you are at one with the Lord of Eternity—
Bonnie wee lass that you are,
My morning-star,
Eilidh-mo-chree, Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo!

Once more let me give a song of his, this
time also, like "Leanabhan-Mo," of those
written while Eilidh was still a breast-babe.

Eilidh, Eilidh,
My bonnie wee lass;
The winds blow
And the hours pass.

But never a wind
Can do thee wrong,
Brown Birdeen, singing
Thy bird-heart song.

And never an hour
But has for thee
Blue of the heaven
And green of the sea—

The Birdeen

Blue for the hope of thee,
Eilidh, Eilidh;
Green for the joy of thee,
Eilidh, Eilidh.

Swing in thy nest, then,
Here on my heart,
Birdeen, Birdeen,
Here on my heart,
Here on my heart!

But Eilidh was "the Birdeen" not only when she could be tossed high in the air in Ian's strong arms, or could toddle to him from *claar* to stool and from stool to chair; not only when she could go long walks with him upon the hills above Loch Long; but when, as a grown lass of twenty, she was so fair to see that the countryside smiled when it saw her, as at the first sunflood swallow, or as at the first calling across dewy meadows of the cuckoo after long days of gloom.

She was tall and slim, with a flower-like way with her: the way of the flower in the sunlight, of the wave on the sea, of the tree-top in the wind. Her changing hazel eyes, now grey-green, now dusked with sea-gloom or a violet shadowiness; her wonderful arched eyebrows, dark so that they seemed black; the beautiful bonnie face of her, with her mobile

The Birdeen

mouth and white flawless teeth; the ears that lay against the tangle of her sun-brown shadowy hair, like pink shells on a drift of seaweed; the exquisite poise of head and neck and body: are not all these things to be read of her in the poems of Ian Mòr? Her voice, too, was sweet against the ears as the singing of hillside burns. But most she was loved for this: that she was ever fresh as the dawn, young as the morning, and alive in every fibre with the joy of life. The old dreamed they were young again, when she was with them; the weary opened their hearts, because she was sunshine; the young were glad and believed that all things might be. Who can tell the many names of the Birdeen? She was called Sunshine, Sunbeam, Way o' the Wind, and a score more of lovely and endearing names. But to every one there was one name that was common, the Birdeen.

“What has she done to be so famous, both through Ian Mòr and others,” was often said of her when, in later years, the first few threads of grey streaked the bonnie hair that was her pride. What has she done, this Eilidh, save what other women do? Ah, well, it is not Eilidh's story I am telling; and she living yet, and like to live till the young

The Birdeen

heart of her is still at last. It will be the going of a sunbeam, that.

But this is for the knowing, and, sure, can be said. She loved the green world with a deep enduring love. Earth, sea, and sky were comradely with her, as with few men and fewer women. And she loved men and women and children just as Ian Mòr loved them, and that was a way not far from the loving way that the Son of Man had, for it was tender and true and heeding little the evil, but rejoicing with laughter and tears over the good. Then, too, there is this: she loved the man to whom she gave herself, with deep passion, that was warm against all chill of change and time and death itself. How few of whom even this much can be said? For deep passion is rare, so rare that men have debased the flawless image to the service of a base coinage. She gave him love, and passion, and the longing of her woman's heart; and she was the flame that was in his brain, for he, too, like Ian Mòr, was a poet and dreamer. Then, after having given joy and strength and the flower of her life, so that he had the brain and the heart of two lives, she gave him the supreme gift she had for the giving, and that was their child, that is called Aluinn because of his beauty, and is now the poet of a new day.

The Birdeen

When she was married to the man whose love for her was almost worship, Ian Mòr said this to him: "Be proud, for she who has filled you with deep meanings and new powers, is herself a proud Queen in whose service you must either live or die with joy."

And to Eilidh herself he said, in a written word he gave her to take away with her: "Rhythms of the music of love for your brain, white-wing'd thoughts for the avenues of your heart, and the song of the White Merle be there!" And the Birdeen was glad at that, for she knew Ian, and all that he meant, and she would rather have had that word than any treasure of men.

To me, long years afterward, he said this: "I have known two women that were of the old race of the Tuatha De-Danann. They were as one, though she with whom my life rose and my life went was Ethlenn, and the other was Eilidh, the Birdeen at whose birthing I was, and who is comrade and friend to me, more than any man has been or any woman. Of each, this is my word: 'A woman beautiful, to be loved, honoured, revered, ay, scarce this side idolatry; but no weakling; made of heroic stuff, of elemental passions; strong to endure, but strong also to conquer and maintain.'"

The Birdeen

Of what one who must be nameless wrote to her I have no right to speak, but here is one verse from his "Song of my Heart," ill-clad by me in this cold English out of the tender Gaelic that has won him the name "Mouth o' Honey." It is in prose I must give it, for I can find or make no rhythm to catch that strange sea-cadence of his:

"Come to my life that is already yours, and at one with you:

Come to my blood that leaps because of you,
Come to my heart that holds you, Eilidh,
Come to my heart that holds you as the green earth
claps and holds the sunlight,
Come to me! Come to me, Eilidh!"

But still—but still—"What has she done, this Eilidh, save what other women do?"

Sure, you must ask this elsewhere than of me. I know no reason for it other than what I have said. She was, and is, "the Birdeen." "Green life to her, green song to her, green joy to her," the old wish of Ian at her naming, has been fulfilled indeed. Why, for that matter, should she be called "the Birdeen"? There are other women as fair to see, as sweet and true, as dear to men and women. Why? Sure, for that, why was Helen, Helen; or Cleopatra, Cleopatra; or Deirdrê, Dierdrê?

The Birdeen

'And, too, why does the common familiar bow that is set in the heavens thrill us in each new apparition as though it were a sudden stair-way to all lost or dreamed-of Edens? As I write I look seaward, and over Innisdûn, the dark precipitous isle that lies in these wide waters even as Leviathan itself, a rainbow rises with vast, unbroken sweep, a skyey flower fed from the innumerable hues of sunset woven this way and that on the looms of the sea. And I know that I have never seen a rainbow before, and of all that I may see I may never see another again as I have seen this. Yet it is a rainbow as others are, and have been and will be for all time past and to come.

Eilidh, that was "the Birdeen" when she laughed at the breast, and was "the Birdeen" when her own Aluinn first turned his father's eyes upon her, and is "the Birdeen" now when the white flower of age is belied by the young eyes and the young, young heart,—Eilidh that I love, Eilidh that has the lilt of life in her brain as no woman I have known or heard of has ever had in like measure, Eilidh is my Rainbow.

II

*"I have tried to feed myself on hopes and dreams all
through these years."*

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN.

*"Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again!
For so the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day."*

"Some there are who do thus in beauty love each other."

MAETERLINCK: *La Beauté Intérieure.*

THE BOOK OF THE OPAL

When my kinsman Ambrose Stuart died last year, he left me many papers, family documents, and the MS. of a book, the third and final part of it unfinished. He died, where for some years he had lived, in Venice. I remember when he went: it was to join his intimate friend and foster-brother, Carolan Stuart, spiritual head of a House of Rest there: and he left his birth-isle in the Hebrides because he could no longer be a priest, having found a wisdom older than that he professed, and gods more ancient than his own, and a vision of beauty, that was not greater than that which dreaming souls see through the incense of the Church—because there is no greater or lesser beauty in the domain of the spirit, but only Beauty—that was to him higher in its heights and deeper in its depths.

The first part of this book is his own story, from childhood to manhood: a story of a remote life, remotely lived; of a singular and pathetic loneliness. The second deals with his thoughts and dreams in Rome during his no-

The Book of the Opal

vitiate, his life in Paris, his priesthood in the Southern Hebrides. The third, and much the longest, though unfinished, is less a narrative than a journal, and begins from the day when he first knew that the prayers in his mind shaped themselves otherwise than as they came to his lips; and that old forgotten wisdom of his people came nearer to his spirit than many sacred words, which, to him, were not the wind, but the infinite circling maze of leaves blown before the wind.

The papers were, for the most part, pages written during those dull days of idle or perplexed thought which came between this change and his abrupt relinquishing of the priesthood. A bitter spirit inhabits them: a spirit of the flesh, and the things of the flesh, and of the dust. Among the latest are one or two of which I am glad, for they show that he sought evil, or if not evil, the common ways of evil, as a man will take a poison to avert death.

The third part of the book comes to within a few days of his death. It deals with his life in Venice: with his inner life, for he lived solitary, and went little among his fellows, and for the most part dwelled with Father Carolan at the Casa San Spirito in the Rio del Occidente.

The Book of the Opal

It was there I saw him a week before his death. I was in Italy, where I had gone for a light and warm air, after a northern winter damp and bleak beyond any I have known: and when I had a letter from him, begging me to leave my friends and to come to Venice to see him before death put him beyond these too many dreams, I went.

From these papers, from that unfinished book, I learned much of a singular and perplexing nature. I believe more readily now that a man or woman may be possessed: or, that two spirits may inhabit the same body, as fire and air together inhabit a jet of flame.

“I am shaken with desire,” he writes in one place, “and not any wind can blow that fire out of my heart. There is no room for even one little flaming word of God in my heart. When I am not shaken with desires, it is only because I am become Desire. And my desire is all evil. It is not of the mind or of the body only, but is of the mind and the body and the spirit. It is my pleasure to deny God. I have no fear.”

And yet, within a page or two of where these words are, and written later on the same day, I find: “There is a star within me which guides me through all darkness. Pride is evil, but there is a pride which great angels know,

The Book of the Opal

they who do not stoop, who hear but do not listen. What are all desires but dust to the feet? I fear above all things the unforgiving love of Him who has dominion. But great love, great hope, these touch with immortal lips my phantom frailties. What day can be vain when I know within myself that I am kin to spirits who do not pass as smoke and flame?"

But because one can understand a man better from what height he may have reached, than from any or all of his poor fallings away, I learned more from a vellum-bound MS. book, written also on vellum, as though he held it as his particular and most intimate utterance, which he gave me the day before he died. For there are many among us who become transparent through the light of their imagination: who, when they mould images of thought and dream, reveal their true selves with an insight that is at once beautiful and terrible. My friend was of these: and I recall seldom, and with ever less heed, the morbid agonies and elations, the bitter perversities, the idle veering of shaken thought, but remember what he wrote, not openly of himself or his apparent life and yet poignantly and convincingly of himself, and of one whom he loved, in *The Book of the Opal*.

The Book of the Opal

He gave me also the rare and beautiful stone after which he had named his book. He told me that it possessed occult powers, but whether of itself, or in the making of its perfect beauty, he could not say; or simply because of its beauty, and because perfect beauty has an infinite radiation and can attract not only influences, but powers. It may well be so.

I read often in this *Book of the Opal*. It is, to me, as the sea is, or the wind: for, like the unseen and homeless creature which in the beginning God breathed between the lips of Heat and Cold, it is full of unbidden meanings and has sighs and laughters: and, like the sea, it has limits and shallows, but holds the stars, and has depths where light is dim and only the still, breathless soul listens; and has a sudden voice that is old as day and night, and is fed with dews and rains, and is salt and bitter.

It was not his will that it should be given to others. "I would like three to read it," he said: "then, in time, it will be moonlight in many minds, and, through the few, thousands will know all in it that has deep meaning for any but myself. For now I am a husbandman who knows he shall not reap what he has sown, but is content if even one seed only sinks and rise. I see a for-

The Book of the Opal

est of souls staring at the stars which are the fruit of the tree that shall grow from that single seed."

This that he desired may or not be: for there is another Husbandman who garners in His own way and at His own time.

When I reached him I saw in his face the shadow of that ill which none may gainsay. He was on a sofa which had been drawn close to the window. The house was in a poor and unfrequented part, but the windows looked across the Laguna Morte, and from the roof-garden one might see at sundown the spires of Padua, like white gossamer caught in that vast thicket of flame and delicate rose which was the West.

It was at this hour, at a sundown such as this, that I saw him. Already the sweat of death was on his brow, though he lived, as in a tremulous, uncertain balance of light and shadow, for seven days.

His mind dwelled almost wholly upon secret things: ancient mysteries, old myths, the forgotten gods and the power and influences starry and demoniacal, dreams, and the august revelation of eternal beauty.

One afternoon he gave me four small objects, of which three were made of ivory and

The Book of the Opal

gold, and the fourth was a rounded stone of basalt double-sphered with gold.

I asked him what meaning they had, for I knew he gave them with meaning.

“Do you not know?” he said. One was the small image of a sword, the other of a spear, the third of a cup.

Then I knew that he had given me the symbols of the four quarters of the earth, and of all the worlds of the universe: the stone for the North, the sword for the East, the spear for the South, and the cup for the West.

“Hold the sword against the light that I may see it,” he whispered; adding, after a while: “I am tired of all thoughts of glory and wonder, of power, and of love that divides.”

The next day, at sundown, he asked me to hold the little gold and ivory spear against the light. “I am tired,” he said, “of all thoughts of dominion, of great kingdoms and empires that come and pass, of insatiable desires, and all that goes forth to smite and to conquer.”

On the day that followed I held before his dimmed eyes the little gold and ivory cup, white as milk in the pale gold of a rain-clear windy set. “I am tired,” he said, “of all thoughts of dreams that outlive the grave, and of fearless eyes looking at the stars, and of

The Book of the Opal

old heroisms, and mystery, and the beauty of all beauty.”

It was on the next day he died. At noon his faint breath bade me lift the stone of basalt, though he could not see that which I held before his eyes. I saw the shadow in his closed eyelids become tremulous and pale blue, like faint, wind-shaken smoke.

When I put the stone on the marble by his side, not more still or white than that other silent thing which lay beside it, I knew that of the eternal symbols of which he has so often written in *The Book of the Opal*, one he had forever relinquished. With him, in that new passage, he had the spear, and the sword, and the little infinite cup that the tears of one heart might fill and yet not all the dews of the incalculable stars cause to overflow.

Among the impersonal episodic parts of *The Book of the Opal* I found much diffuse and crude material, often luminous with living thought—the swimming thought of timeless imagination out of which an old-time romance of two worlds has been woven: two worlds, the one as the other remote from us now, though each in degree to be recovered, if neither till after a deeper “sea-change” than any modern world has yet known.

The Book of the Opal

Though the soul is the still-water in which each of us may dimly discern this "sea-change"; Art, which is the symbolic language of the soul, is alone, now, the common mirror with which all may look. And Art, we must remember, is the continual recovery of a bewildered tradition, the tradition of Beauty and of Joy and of Youth, that like the Aztec word *Ahecatl*—which signifies the Wind, and the Breath, and the Soul—are but the three mortal names for one immortal Word.

THE WELLS OF PEACE

When Ian Mòr, of whom elsewhere I have spoken so often, was a man in the midway of life, he sought the Wells of Peace.

All his life long he had desired other things. But when a man has lived deeply he comes at last to long for rest. Beauty, joy, life, these may be his desire: but soon or late he will seek the Wells of Peace.

I speak of a man such as Ian Mòr was. There is too vast a concourse of those who herd ignobly among the low levels of desire: of these I do not speak, knowing little of them, for there are stars in my inner life that guide my stumbling feet elsewhere and otherwise.

He has quiet now. There is sleep upon his brain that was so tired. There is balm upon his spirit. He has peace, there, where he lies in deep, unheeding rest, under a rowan on a green hillside.

When he was ill with the death-weariness, though none saw signs of that, for it was from within, I asked him once what was the thing

The Wells of Peace

he remembered best out of life—he who had lived so deeply, and was a poet and dreamer, and had loved with the great love.

He answered me in the Gaelic he loved. It is a saying of the people; but to me never common now, who see in the words the colour of his deep enduring loneliness.

“*Deireadh gach comuinn, sgaoileadh; deireadh gach cogaidh, sìth*”—the end of all meetings, parting: the end of all striving, peace. “*Deireadh gach cogaidh, sìth*”: I have slept often to the quiet music of that.

When he was in the midway of life, Ian Mòr went deep and far into the dark valley of weariness. The beauty of the world, the mystery of the human soul, the flame-like ecstasy of his dream: these sustained him. And when, at last, the radiance was without mystery, and the mystery without vista; when the loveliness of light and shadow over all the green earth and ancient hills and ever-changeable, unchanging sea, was a mere idle pageant for tired eyes—then was he sustained only by the star of his love. Far away she was. God knows in what unplumbed, fathomless depths of loneliness the following love pursues its quest. Afar off, he loved. Fair star of his redemption; he could always discern that light through the darkness of his homeless heart.

The Wells of Peace

She was of the old heroic mould. "Joy and deep love," he said to her once, "these will be our stars." She smiled gravely in whispering back, "And strength and endurance."

Through how many strange gulfs he had sailed, through what hazardous straits, against what adverse winds and tides, before he set his course for the one haven he had never found; that port which each mariner on the sea of life has heard of, which many have descried across the running wave, which ever and again a few have found and entered: the blue quietudes of the haven of Peace.

I do not remember when it was that Ian Mòr went forth upon his quest. He was in the midway of life; that I know; and he arose one day from where he lay upon the hillside, dreaming an old, sweet, impossible dream. It is enough.

He went down the hillside of Ben Maiseach, through the still purpled heather and the golden-bracken. Behind him the slopes rose pale blue, with isles of deeper azure where a few drifting clouds trailed their shadows across the upland moors. Beneath him, and just beyond the Glen of the Willows, the Gorrormalt Water made a few shimmering curves of light among the green of hazel-thickets and fern; farther, the low hills broke into a ser-

The Wells of Peace

rated crest, as of a spent and broken billow. Beyond, lay a single, long, suspensive wave, immutable, pale as turquoise, ethereal as blue smoke. It was the sea.

A quiet region. Few crofts lightened the hillsides. Scanty pastures twisted this way and that among the granite boulders and endless green surf of fern.

On that solitary way, from the end of Monanair to where the path of the Glen of the Willows diverges, Ian Mòr met no one. In the glen itself he passed a woman, a tinker's wife, dishevelled, with sullen eyes and ignoble mien, carrying wearily a sleeping child. He spoke, but she gave no other answer than a dull stare.

He passed her, dreaming his dream. A redbreast, who had found his fall-o'-the-leaf song, flew before him a while, fluting brief cries.

"Ah, birdeen, birdeen," he cried, "be the bird of the rainbow and lead me to my love."

But the redbreast fluttered idly into a thicket of red-brown bramble, and Ian walked slowly on. Something lay upon his heart.

"Lead me to my love," he muttered over and over.

Suddenly he turned and moved swiftly back. When he came upon the woman he smiled, and said again in the sweet, homely

The Wells of Peace

Gaelic, "God be with you, and a quiet night." The sullen eyes wandered idly over him.

"Let me help you," he asked.

She held out her hand, the hollow palm upward. But when he said simply that he had no money, she cursed him.

"You are weary, poor woman," he added, taking no notice of her bitter words. "Let me carry the child for you a bit. Sure, 'tis a heavy weight at the end o' the day, but not so heavy as the burden o' want and the hand o' sorrow."

The woman looked at Ian suspiciously, but at last she gave him the child:

For a time they walked in silence, side by side.

"Is the child a lass or a boy?" Ian asked after a while.

"A lassie, worse luck."

His heart yearned. He looked into the little one's eyes, for she had wakened, and the last light of day was in those deep-blue pools, so fathomless and quiet.

Ian remembered a song he had made, years and years before, when his life was green as June, and his heart glad as May, and his thought light as April. The memory came running like a feshet over a barren course. Tears welled from his heart into his eyes.

The Wells of Peace

And so, remembering, he sang in a low, murmuring voice :

“Ah, Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, dear to me, dear and sweet,
In dreams I am hearing the sound of your little running feet;
The sound of your running feet that like the sea-hoofs beat
A music by day and night, Eilidh, on the sands of my heart, my sweet.

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, put off your wee hands from the heart o' me;
It is pain they are making there, where no more pain should be:
For little running feet, an' wee white hands, an' croodlin' as of the sea,
Bring tears to my eyes . . . tears, tears, out o' the heart o' me,

Mo lennav-a-chree,
Mo lennav-a-chree!”

While he sang, low as it was, the woman trudged on seemingly unhearing. When he ceased she spoke, with choking words and a gasp in her throat.

“Sing those last lines over again.”

Ian glanced at her. Putting the child over into the hollow of his right arm, he slipped his hand into that of the tattered, dishevelled woman, as she tramped wearily on, her sullen eyes now red. He sang low :

The Wells of Peace

“For little running feet, an’ wee white hands, an’
croodlin’ as of the sea,
Bring tears to my eyes . . . tears, tears, out o’ the
heart o’ me,

Mo lennav-a-chree,
Mo lennav-a-chree!”

“Why is there weeping upon you, poor woman?” he asked of her, in the kindly idiom of those who have the Gaelic.

Suddenly she stopped, and leaned against a birch; her breast shook with sobs.

For long she sobbed with bitter tears. Gently Ian soothed her out of the deep, warm pity that was ever in his heart for poor, sorrowful women. Soon she told him. The child he carried was not hers, but that of the woman her tinker-husband had taken to himself when she, his wife, proved barren.

“An’ I’ve only one hope,” she cried, “an’ only one dream, an’ that’s to feel the wee white hands, an’ to hear the running feet, and to hear the croodlin’ as of the sea, of my own, own bairn.”

Looking upon the poor vagrant, Ian’s heart melted in pity. Deep, wonderful love of the mother, that could court hunger and privation and misery and all else as dross only for the kiss of little lips, the light in little eyes, the mothering touch. The poor, uncomely

The Wells of Peace

wench he thought: for sure, for sure, Mary, the Mother of All, called to her from afar off, with sister-sweet whispering and deep compassionate love.

They talked no more till they came to the little inn at the far end of the Glen of the Willows. The man there knew Ian Mòr, and so promised readily to give the woman shelter and food for that day, and the morrow, which was the Sabbath.

At the rising of the moon Ian left her. She had no speech, but she stammered piteous, ungracious words. Peradventure he understood right well. When he kissed the child, she put her little arms round his neck, and clung to him like a white butterfly against a bole of pine.

As he left the last birches of the Glen of the Willows, and heard the vague, inland rumour of the sea echoing through a gully in the shoreward hills, another wayfarer joined him. It was Art, the son of Mary Gilchrist, he who as a little lad had been found, weary, in that very place, by a stranger who had taken him to a forest booth and shown him the mystery of the Twelve Weavers, who every day of the days meet at the Last Supper—for with them who are immortal there is no last or first.

For a brief while they spoke of one another.

The Wells of Peace

Then Ian told Art his friend that his weariness had become a burden too great to be borne; and that, tired of all things—tired of living most of all, tired even of hope—he had come forth to seek the Wells of Peace.

“And Art,” he added, “if you will tell me where I may find these, you will have all the healing love that is in my heart.”

“There are seven Wells of Peace, Ian Mòr. Four you found long since, blind dreamer; and of one you had the sweet, cool water a brief while ago; and the other is where your hour waits; and the seventh is under the rainbow.”

Ian Mòr turned his eager, weary eyes upon the speaker.

“The Wells of Peace,” he muttered, “which I have dreamed of—which I have dreamed of through tears and longing, and old, familiar pain, and sorrow too deep for words.”

“Even so, Ian. Poet and dreamer, you too have been blind, for all your seeing eyes and wonder-woven brain and passionate dream.”

“Tell me! What are the four Wells of Peace I have already passed and drunken of and not known?”

“They are called ‘Love,’ ‘Beauty,’ ‘Dream,’ and ‘Endurance.’”

The Wells of Peace

Ian bowed his head. Tears dimmed his eyes.

“Art,” he whispered, “Art, bitter, bitter waters were those that I drank in that fourth Well of Peace. For I knew not the waters were sweet, then. And even now, even now, my heart faints at that shadowy well.”

“It is the Well of Strength, Ian, and its waters rise out of that of Love, which you found so passing sweet.”

“And what is that of which I drank a brief while ago?”

“It was in the Glen of the Willows. You felt its cool breath when you turned and went back to that poor, outcast woman, and saw her sorrow, and looked into the eyes of the little one. And you drank of it when you gave the woman peace. It is the well where the Son of God sits forever, dreaming His dream. It is called ‘Compassion.’”

And so, Ian thought, he had been at the Well of Peace that is called Compassion, and not known it.

“Tell me, Art, what are the sixth and seventh?”

“The sixth is where your hour waits. It is the Well of Rest; deep, deep sleep; deep, deep rest; balm for the weary brain, the weary heart, the spirit that hath had weariness for

The Wells of Peace

comrade and loneliness as a bride. It is a small well that, and shunned of men, for its portals are those of the grave, and the soft breath of it steals up through brown earth and the ancient, dreadful quiet of the underworld."

"And the seventh? That which is under the rainbow in the West?"

"Ian, you know the old, ancient tales. Once, years ago, I heard you tell that of Ulad the Lonely. Do you remember what was the word on the lips of his dream when, after long years, he saw her again when both met at last under the rainbow?"

"Ay, for sure. It was the word of triumph, of joy, the whisper of peace: "*There is but one love.*"

"When you hear that, Ian, and from the lips of her whom you have loved and love, then you shall be standing by the Seventh Well."

They spoke no more, but moved slowly onward through the dusk. The sound of the sea deepened. The inland breath rose, as on a vast wing, but waned, and passed like perishing smoke against the starry regions in the gulfs above.

When the moon sank behind the ridge-set pines of Benallan, and darkness oozed out of

The Wells of Peace

every thicket and shadowy place, and drowned the black-green boughs and branches in a massed obscurity, Ian turned.

His quest was over. Not beyond those crested hills, nor by the running wave on the shore, whose voice filled the night as though it were the dark whorl of a mighty shell: not there, nor in this nor that far place, were the Wells of Peace.

Love, Beauty, Dream, Endurance, Compassion, Rest, Love-Fulfilled; for sure the Wells of Peace were not far from home.

So Ian Mòr went back to his loneliness and his pain and his longing.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE HILLS

The people in the Strath above Ardnathonn said that Ivor M'Iain the shepherd had dwelled overlong among the hills. It may have been so. The wind and the shadows of clouds had become the images of his dreams and of that which was behind his dreams; and falling water, and the bleating of sheep on the high pastures, and the cries of hawks and ravens, had no other sound or meaning for him than the many sounds that had grown into one silence.

At night, when the sky was clear, he travelled miles across the high, lonely moors. Familiar companionships habited there, but no other: the lapwings wheeled, crying their thin, poignant cries; or the grouse made a sudden clamour as they flew low, startled by his wandering feet; or a wailing rose like passing smoke against the mountain-slopes, voices of the unresting curlews. When the moon hung vast and yellow above the desolate slopes, or low upon the line where the moors crept into the sky, sometimes strange and unfamiliar agi-

In the Shadow of the Hills

tations filled the night. But there were always the hills in their deep silence, the mountain solitudes, the solemn passage of the stars.

He was a shepherd because his father had been a shepherd: and was content to be a shepherd, because he had little English, and was strangely disquieted when he heard many voices, or the ceaseless, idle noise of familiar things of which those speak much who have the strange, pathetic, infinite dread of silence and of beauty; and because the hills drew him to them.

When the years slipped one upon another, and Ivor M'Iain was no more a young man, but was forty, and already had more gray than brown in his hair, the clan-folk in the glens and along the great Strath wondered why he did not live oftener in the good stone house, with its byres and potato-fields, that had been his father's, and was now his: and why, too, he took no woman to live with him there, for company and for children, if not because of hungry love.

But Ivor M'Iain had already known love, and how great a thing it is, and how small. He had seen the unchanging stars through the hair of her whom he loved, and had seen them veer and become children of the abyss. He was of the few to whom love is not the sweet

In the Shadow of the Hills

or bitter accident of life, but is life. A tall, silent man, grey and rugged, fifteen years ago he had been called Imhir Aluinn, Ivor the Handsome; and had been secretly loved by women, and had loved lightly himself, till he came to the one love.

But the years trampled his youth under foot. Sorrow breathed a grey change upon his hair, and a grey silence into his life; then dwelled with him as his comrade, looking out upon all things, great and small, from his steadfast eyes. This sorrow, that was a grief too intimate to be thought of by him as either grief or sorrow, but had become the colour and sound of life, was because of two things that were both mortal and immortal. The love of the woman in whose little, eager heart he had put his life, as one might with great joy lay the sacrifice on an altar, was one of these; the other was the beauty of her whom he loved, because it was so rare and wonderful in itself, and because it was to him the temporal and visible self of a beauty beyond mortal beauty and of a beauty beyond mortal change.

From the day he loved her he saw a shadow draw nearer. In some strange, mysterious way life gave again what it took from her. When from too great weakness she could no more go out upon the heather, or stand under

In the Shadow of the Hills

the mountain-ash by the brown rushing burn with its birch and fern-shadowed pools, or could no more gather flowers, or watch the wild roses glimmer with falling dew, or the stars gather one by one or in still companies out of dove-grey silences, Ian saw that the beauty of these things, so near and familiar, so remote and beyond all words, so finite alone, so infinite together—as a breath is at once a thing that dies, and is part of the one Breath that is life—had passed into her. There was not anything lost to her of the falling dew, of the loosened fragrances, of the flickering of leaf and fern, of the little radiant lives of flowers, of the still stars; these passed into her, and were a bloom upon her face, and a mystery in her eyes, and a light upon that which was comrade to these momentary breaths, and to that other Breath, wherein these were neither less nor greater than the shining constellations and the ancient, time-forgetting stars.

Great love had brought great sorrows: and it was not the less great because in so large a part inarticulate. In her, he knew the highest. Life could give him no greater joy, if no deeper sorrow. He was grateful. And in his love she, for her part, forgot that youth was for her a flower that had to be relinquished

In the Shadow of the Hills

while its bloom was still unfaded, while its fragrance was most sweet: that temporal beauty had dear mortal needs: and that the unfathomable silences wherein she was soon to sink were a cold bride-bed for desires so limited in hope and so vast in faith.

There are few who love thus. Theirs was that heroic love, not dependent upon those bitter-sweet claims and satieties which sustain lesser dreams; wherein faith was so absolute that neither knew there could be unfaith, and love so deep that neither knew love's feet could stray.

They had great rewards. She left him, herself glad with august sureties, her memory without the least ignoble stain. And he: he had that for which the crowned and the laurelled have bowed their heads in intolerable, sad desire; and was more rich than misers who stare upon idle gold; and lit daily upon a secret altar a flame more great and wonderful than that which shines upon the brows of ancient cities, being more ancient than they.

To many of us these rapt passions are passions that cannot be, or that dwell only in the moonlit realms of the mind. That they should be possible among the humble is a reproach, and therefore belief halts.

But heroic love is not a dream. And though

In the Shadow of the Hills

he was only a shepherd, Ivor M'Iain knew this: and when I write of him, I write of one whom I knew, and of what I know.

It was after his supreme loss that he was seen so seldom, and was yet so well loved, and often longed for.

But thereafter he dwelled more and more among the great solitudes, and dreamed dreams that could not be true for Ivor M'Iain, but could be true for that which passed by that name, and through temporal eyes looked out upon the immortal things of beauty and desire.

Solitary, he tended his sheep day by day and week by week and month by month; and saw moons follow moons, and the sad march of the stars fill the nights, and knew vain, limitless desires; and from winter to spring, and from spring to winter, carried into these silences his patient heart, that little, infinite thing that God appals with the terror of Eternity.

THE DISTANT COUNTRY

"He has loved, perhaps; of a surety he has suffered. Inevitably must he too have heard the 'sounds that come from the distant country of Splendour and Terror'; and many an evening has he bowed down in silence before laws that are deeper than the sea."

There is a poet's tale that I love well, and have often recalled; and of how in the hour of death love may be so great that it transcends the height of hills and the waste of deserts and the salt reaches of the sea.

Last night I dreamed of Ithel and Bronwen: confusedly, for a noise of waves and the crying of an inland bird were continuously wrought into the colours and fragrances of places remote from moor and sea, with the colours and fragrances of a land of orchards and pastures and quiet meres, and with the thin, poignant fragrances and acute breadths of colour of the sun-wrought East.

And when I woke, I knew it was not really Ithel and Bronwen, Red Ithel and Pale Bronwen, of whom I had been dreaming. Nor yet of an old grey day, nor of the remote East,

The Distant Country

but of two whom I knew well, and of this West of rains and rainbows, of tears and hopes, which I love as a child loves a widowed mother.

Then I slept again, and before dawn dreamed, and again awoke. But it was not of Bronwen and Ithel now that I dreamed, but of Aillinn and Bailê the Sweet-Spoken.

Among the stories of the Gael there is one that women love most. It is that of Bailê the Sweet-Spoken. When Bailê, who lived in one part of the country of the Gaels, suffered in any wise, Aillinn, who lived in another part, suffered also and with the same suffering. So great was their love that distance between them was no more than a flow of water between two other flows in a narrow stream. That is love, that cannot live apart. But in an evil hour the hate of a base nature caused a death-image to appear to Aillinn and to Bailê Honey-mouth. And when Bailê the Sweet-Spoken saw his dead love, his heart broke, and the grass was less cold than was that which lay upon it. And when Aillinn saw her dead love, her life went away in a breath, and she was more white than were the white daisies in the grass where her great beauty lay like a stilled flame. Each was buried where each fell. Then this wonder was

The Distant Country

known throughout the lands of the Gaels, that an apple-tree straightway grew out of the grave of Aillinn, which the wind and the sun and moon and unseen powers moulded at the top into the form and head of Bailê; and that out of the grave of Bailê grew a yew-tree, of the upper leaves and branches of which the unseen powers and the moon and the sun and the wind wrought the fair, beautiful head of Aillinn. That is love, that cannot dream apart. That is love, that forever remoulds love nearer and nearer to the desire of the heart.

And when seven years had passed, the yew-tree and the apple-tree were laid low. It may be that one who loved not with the great love bade this to be done: for it is only the few who love as Aillinn and Bailê loved, and the smaller or weaker the soul is, the more does it abhor or be troubled by the white flame. But the poets and seers made tablets of the apple-wood and the yew-wood, and wrote thereon amorous and beautiful words. Later, it happened that the Ardrigh summoned the poets to bring these tablets before him at the House of the Kings. But hardly had he touched them when the yew-wood and the apple-wood were suddenly one wood, swift in their coming together as when two waves meet

The Distant Country

at sea and are one wave. And the king and those about him could see the pale apple-wood inwoven with the dark yew-wood, nor could any magic or incantation undo that miracle. So the Ardrigh bade the wood of the love of Aillinn and Bailê be taken to the treasury, and be kept there with the sacred emblems of great powers and demons and gods and the trophies of the heroes. And that is love, that heeds neither the word of man, nor the bitterness of death, nor the open law, nor the law that is secret and inscrutable.

But when I heard a mavis singing above the dew on the white wild-roses, and saw the blue light like a moving blue flame underslidden with running gold, and knew that it was day, I thought no more of Aillinn and of Bailê the Sweet-Spoken, nor of Red Ithel and Pale Bronwen, nor of the far, dim East where Ithel lay among the sands and Bronwen's love flickered like a shadow; nor of the dim day of those four lovers of dream; but of two whom I loved well and who had their day in this West of rains and rainbows, of tears and hopes.

Love is at once so great and so frail that there is perhaps no thought which can at the same time so appal and uplift us. And there

The Distant Country

is in love, at times, for some an unfathomed mystery. That which can lead to the stars can lead to the abyss. There is a limit set to mortal joy as well as to mortal suffering, and the flame may overleap itself in one as in the other. The most dread mystery of a love that is overwhelming is its death through its own flame.

This is an "untold story" that I write. None could write it. A few will understand: to most it will be at once as real and as unreal as foam, as no more than the phosphorescence of emotion. One may see, and yet deny: as one may see in the nocturnal wave a flame that is not there, or a star caught momentarily in the travelling hollow, and know that there is no flame but only a sudden gleam of infinitesimal, congregated life; no star, but only a wandering image. But, also, one may deny that which is not phantasmal. He who is colour-blind cannot see colour: he who is blind to that infinite flame of life which creates the blue mist of youth and love and romance cannot discern in youth or love or romance the names of those primitive ecstasies that in themselves are immortal things, though we see only their fruitions and decays: and he whose soul is obscure, or whose spirit is blind, cannot see those things which pertain to the spirit, or

The Distant Country

understand those things wherein the spirit expresses itself.

But for the some who care, I write these few words: not because I know a mystery, and would reveal it, but because I have known a mystery, and am to-day as a child before it, and can neither reveal nor interpret it.

They loved each other well, the two of whom I speak. It was no lesser love, though upheld by desires and fed with flame; but knew these, and recognised in them the bodily images of a flame that was not mortal and of desires that were not finite. They knew all of joy and sorrow that can come to man and woman through the mysterious gates of Love, which to some seem of dusk and to some seem of morning or the radiances of noon.

Year by year their love deepened. I know of no love like theirs.

One hears everywhere that passion is but unsatisfied desire, that love is but a fever. So, too, as I have heard, the moles, which can see in twilight and amid the earthly glooms they inhabit, cannot see the stars even as shining points upon the branches of trees, nor these moving branches even, nor their wind-lifted shadows.

Their love did not diminish, but grew,

The Distant Country

through tragic circumstances. As endurance became harder,—for love deepened and passion became as the bird of prey that God sets famished in the wilderness, while the little and great things of common life came in upon this love like a tide,—it seemed to each that they only withdrew the more into that which was for them not the most great thing in life, but life.

To her, he was not only the man she loved: to whom she had given the inward, unnameable life as well as that which dwelled in the heart and in the mind, in the pulse and the blood and the nerves. He was Love itself; and when sometimes he whispered in her hair, she heard other words, and knew that a greater than he whom she loved spoke with hidden meanings.

How could she tell what she was to him? She was a flame to his mind as well as to his life: that she knew. But he could not tell her what words fail to tell. She could feel his heart beat: his pulse rose to her eyes as a wave to the moon: in those eyes of his she could see that which was in her own heart, but which she had to blind and lead blindfold, because a woman cannot look upon that which is intolerable. Doubtless it was not so with him. This she could not know. But she knew her

The Distant Country

own heart. The untranslatable call was there. She heard it in those silences where women listen.

Sometimes she looked at him, wondering: at times, even with a sudden fear. She did not fear him whom she loved, but unknown forces behind him. He spoke to her sometimes of that which cannot pass: of love more enduring than the hills, of passion, of the spirit, of deathless things. She feared them. She did not fear with the mind: that leaped, as a doe to the water-springs. She did not fear with the body, for that abhorred death and the ending of dreams. But something within her feared. These things he spoke of were too great and terrible a wind for a little, wandering flame.

Did he not think thus himself? she wondered. Was it because he was a man that he spokè, blithely of these far-off, beautiful and terrible things?

Once they were lying on a grassy slope, on a promontory, on a warm, moonlit night. A single pine-tree grew on the little, rocky buttress: and against this they leaned, and looked through the branches at the pale, uncertain stars, or into the moving, dark, mysterious water.

“It is our love,” he whispered to her: “we

The Distant Country

are on the granite rock: and through the tree of our little world we look at the unchanging stars: and this moving tide is the mystery that is forever about us, and whispers so much, and tells so little."

It was sweet to hear: and she loved him who whispered: and the thought was her own. But that night she lay thinking for hour upon hour, or, rather, her mind was but a swimming thought; a thought that swam idly on still seas in deep darkness. How wonderful were these dreams that love whispered: how . . .

But when at sunrise she woke, it was with a sense that the horizons of life crept closer and closer. She smiled sadly as she thought of how measurable are the mortalities we flatter with infinitude: the sands of the desert, the green hair of the grass, the waves of the sea.

Often, of late, she knew that he who loved her was strangely disquieted. "Too many dreams," he said once, with double meaning, smiling as he looked at her, but with an unexpressed trouble in his eyes.

More and more, because of the great, enduring, pitiless flame of love, she turned to the little things of the hour and the moment. It is the woman's way, and is a law. And more and more, wrought by longings and desires, he

The Distant Country

whom she loved turned to the inward contemplation of the things that are immortal, to the longings and desires that have their roots in the soul, but whose tendrils reach beyond the stars, and whose flowers grow by the waters of life in Edens beyond dream. It may not be men's way; and he had the fatal gift of the imagination, which is to men what great beauty is to women—a crown of stars and a slaying sword.

They turned the same way, not knowing it. How could they know, being blind? Blind children they were.

He feared the flame would consume them. She feared it would consume itself.

Therein lay the bitterness. But for her, being a woman, the depths were deeper. He had his dreams.

When, at last, the end came—a tragic, an almost incredible end, perhaps, for love did not change, passion was not slain, but translated to a starry dream, and every sweet and lovely intercourse was theirs still—the suffering was too great to be borne. Yet neither death nor tragic mischance came with veiled healing.

Love, won at a supreme hazard (and again, I do not tell the story of these two, who had, and now in the further silences have, their

The Distant Country

own secret, forever sacred), proved a stronger force than life. Life that can be measured, that is so measurable, is as a child before the other unknown power, that is without measure. The man did not understand. He fed the flame with dreams upon dreams, with hopes upon hopes; with more dreams and more hopes.

Once, dimly foreseeing the end, she said, "Love can be slain. It is mortal." He answered, almost with anger, that sooner could the soul die. She looked at him, wondering that he, whose imagination was so much greater than hers, could not understand.

She loved to the edge of death by will. Will can control the mortal things of love. Instinct wore her heart by day and by night. She put her frail strength into the balance, then her dreams, then her memories. Before the end, hesitating, but not for herself, she put her whole mind there. Still, life weighed lower and lower the scale.

One day they talked of immaterial things. Suddenly he asked her a question.

She was silent. The room was in darkness, for the fire had burned low. He could see only the ruddy gleam on the white skirt; the two white hands; the little restless flame in an opal.

The Distant Country

Then, quietly, she told him. She had not ceased to love: it was not that.

Simply, love had been too great a flame. At the last, at that moment, she had striven to save all: she had already put all in the balance, all but her soul. That, too, she had now put there with swift and terrible suddenness.

The balance trembled, then Life weighed the scale lower, and lower.

It was gone. That had gone away upon the wind, which was light as it, homeless as it, as mysterious. Out of the balance she took back what else she had put there: her mind, quiet, sane, serene now, if that can be serene that neither fears nor cares because it does not feel: and the dreams and desires, that had turned to loosened fragrances and shadows: and hopes, grey as the ashes of wood, that fell away and were no more.

She was the same and yet not the same. He trembled, but dare not understand. In his mind were falling stars.

"I will give you all I have to give," she said; "to you, who have had all I had to give, I give that which is left. It is an image that has no life."

When he walked that night alone under the stars he understood. Love can come, not in his mortal but in his immortal guise: as a

The Distant Country

spirit of flame. There is no alchemy of life which can change that tameless and fierce thing, that power more intense than fire, that creature whose breath consumes what death only silences.

It had come close and looked at them. Long ago he had prayed that it might be so. In answer, the immortal had come to the mortal. How little of all that was to be he had foreseen when, by a spiritual force, he accomplished that too intimate, that too close union, in which none may endure! I speak of a mystery. That it may be, that to many, if not all, this thing that I say will be meaningless, I know. But I do not try to explain what is not a matter of words: nay, I could not, for though I believe, I know of this mystery only through those two who broke (or of whom one broke) some occult but imperious spiritual law.

They lived long after this great change: Their love never faltered. Each, as before, came close to the other, as day and night ceaselessly meet in dawns and twilights.

But that came to her no more which had gone. For him, he grew slowly to understand a love more great than his. His had not known the innermost flame, that is pure fire.

Strange and terrible thoughts came to him

The Distant Country

at times. The waste places of the imagination were peopled.

Often, as he has told me, through sleepless nights a solemn marching as of a vast throng rose and fell, a dreadful pulse. But, for him, life was fulfilled. I know that he had always one changeless hope. I do not know what, in the end, clouded or unclouded that faithful spirit. But I, too, who knew them, who loved them, have my assured faith: the more, not the less, now that they are gone to that "distant country of Splendour and Terror." Love is more great than we conceive, and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions. Of her, I have had often, I have ever, in my mind the words wherewith I begin one of the tales in this book: "It is God that builds the nest of the blind bird."

A MEMORY OF BEAUTY

"Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young."

WEBSTER.

Many years ago a beautiful dark woman came to Ardnathonn, and lived there a while, and died, as she had lived, in silence.

None in that remote place knew who she was; nor of any there was ever known the name of the man who loved her, and died, or the name of another man who loved her, and died.

They called her "the foreign woman"; and where the nettle sheds her snow above the lichened stones in the little seaweed-sloping graveyard, there appear on one stone these words only: *The Stranger*.

In the ruined garden of Tighnardnathonn stands a broken sundial. Here may still be deciphered the legend: *Time Past: Time to Come*.

Time past, time to come. It is the refrain of our mortality.

A Memory of Beauty

And Aileen? . . . That great beauty of hers is no more. It is unthinkable. If loveliness can pass away as a breath . . . nay, did not one in Asia of old, one of the seers of the world, interpret thus: "I am Beauty itself among beautiful things." The dream that is the body eternally perishes; only the dream that is the soul endures.

It is a commonplace that death is held most mournful when it is the seal of silence upon youth, upon what is beautiful. Peradventure, life incomplete may some day be revealed to us as the sole life that is complete. Howbeit we need not lament when love has been gloriously present. I think often of that old sundial inscription:

"Light and Shade by turns,
But Love always . . ."

To have loved supremely! After all, the green, sweet world had been good to her, its daughter. She had loved and been loved, with the passion of passion. Nothing in the world could take away that joy; not any loss or sorrow, nor that last grief, the death of him whom she so loved; not the mysterious powers themselves that men call God, and that move and live and have their blind will behind the blowing wind and the rising sap, behind the

A Memory of Beauty

drifting leaf and the granite hills, behind the womb of woman and the mind of man, behind the miracle of day and night, behind life, behind death.

This was hers. She had this supreme heritage. In truth she was crowned. And he . . . from the first he wore the glory of her love, as morning wears the sunrise. It is enough.

Can love itself be as an idle bow upon our poor perishing heavens? Is love a dream, a dream within a dream? If so, the soul herself were a vain image, as fleeting as the travelling shadow of a wave.

Alas, how brief that lovely hour which was her life! It is only in what is loveliest, most fugitive, that eternity reveals, as in a sudden flame, as in the vanishing facet of a second, the beauty of all beauty; that it whispers, in the purple hollow of the dancing flame, the incommunicable word.

Strange mystery, that so many ages had to come and go, so many lives to be lived, so many ecstasies and raptures and sorrows and vicissitudes to flame and be and pass, just to produce one frail flower of perfection. I sometimes think of this unknown loveliness, this woman whose sole pulse now is in the sap of the grass over her head, not as a mortal

A Memory of Beauty

joy, but as the breath or symbol of a most ancient and ever new mystery, the mystery of eternal beauty :

“ . . . For I have seen
In lonely places, and in lonelier hours,
My vision of the rainbow-aureoled face
Of her whom men name Beauty: proud, austere:
Dim vision of the flawless, perfect face,
Divinely fugitive, that haunts the world,
And lifts man's spiral thought to lovelier dreams.”

She is gone now who was so fair. Can great beauty perish? The unlovely is as the weed that is everywhere under the sun. But that wind which blows the seed, alike of the unlovely and of the children of beauty—can it have failed to wed that exhaled essence to the glory of light, so that somewhere, somehow, that which was so beautiful is?

ENYA OF THE DARK EYES

On the day when Firbis of the Seven Dúns, called Firbis the White, from the long white hair which fell upon his shoulders, and also because of his pale face, pale as a leper's, with scarlet lips, told Cathba, the son of Cathba Mòr, that he might have his daughter to wife, Enya of the Dark Eyes was not to be found.

At first Firbis laughed. Then when he saw Cathba frowning and muttering, he waxed wroth, and bade a search be made for the girl.

It was Culain of the Trails who found her. She was in the depth of the great forest beyond Dùn-Fhirbis, and was with Aodh¹ the Singer. No man in that region knew who Aodh was, save that he was a hillman out of the north. This was because he was under *geas* to wear a fawnskin covering over his face, with slits in it for his eyes and mouth and nostrils: nor might he break that vow. His songs were the sweetest that man or

¹ *Aodh* is pronounced as the letter *Y*.

Enya of the Dark Eyes

woman had heard: there were none in Alba sweeter. And when he played they called him the Green Harper, for a spell was upon them in that playing. He had no name among them but "The Harper." Once Cathba taunted him, and said openly he did not believe it was a true *geas*, and that the man was a spy. Amid the lifting of spears and the sudden tremulous movement of swords, as though a wind were there, Aodh stood unmoved. He took his harp and played; and in the silence thereafter he touched the strings again, and chanted an old ancestral song, passing sweet. When he ceased, every weapon slept.

But now Culain of the Trails saw the Harper, with the fawnskin masque away from his face and lying at his feet on the green moss.

On a branch of a fallen oak Enya of the Dark Eyes lay, idly swaying. Her eyes were filled with light while she watched Aodh.

"My lord and my king," she cried in a low voice, so thrilling sweet that Culain trembled, being only a youth and a dreamer of dreams. It was when Aodh had ceased singing a song to her.

Culain turned and sank among the bracken. But Aodh had heard. The arrow flew, whistling a thin song, and went in between the

Enya of the Dark Eyes

white shoulders of the youth, till it thrust its head into the oak-root underneath his breast.

Aodh came forward and looked at him.

"That arrow-flight is my grief," he said gravely, "for you are young and comely."

"It is Culain," whispered Enya, who had come swiftly to where the slain man lay; "it is Culain of the Trails."

"Yes," answered Culain, when he had spat the blood and foam from his mouth, but without turning his head, for that he could not do, being arrow-pinned: "yes, it is Culain, and it is my last trail."

"Let him be," Enya whispered, when she saw the Harper raise his spear; "let him be, O Aodh, my lord. He may yet live."

"It was to make the end less hard. But as you will, Enya." Then the two moved deeper into the wood.

Later, the runners found Culain. But he was dead. At sundown Firbis heard Enya singing in the grianân over the great Hall of the Horns. He called to her, and told her that on the morrow she was to be the wife of Cathba. Enya said no word; but at the rising of the moon she went to the forest-edge and gave three hoots of the white owl.

"Who will make a song for this mar-

Enya of the Dark Eyes

riage?" said Firbis after the ale-feast in the morning. "Where is the Harper?"

But none had seen him. An old man said he had met him at moonrise, and that he was on a white stallion and riding against the stars of the north.

At noon, Cathba took Enya to wife. So great was her beauty, that men looked askance at him, and old men sat silent, heavy with fear.

"Sing to me," he said.

She sang. It was a song of love. He laughed when she set down the little gold-bossed clàrsach, and put back the hair from his eyes.

"Why do you laugh, Cathba Fleetfoot?"

"Because that you know not what you sang when you sang that song; yet, even as you sang, so shall it be."

Enya stooped and lifted the clàrsach again; and as she put back her head from that stooping, her eyes filled with fire. Suddenly she laughed.

"Why do you laugh, Enya of the Dark Eyes?"

"Because Aodh the Singer, Aodh the King, is here, and he comes for me, who am his wife."

Cathba sprang to his feet. But the wolf-thong was round him, and he was bound hand

Enya of the Dark Eyes

and foot before he could draw the long gold-hilted knife that he wore.

Aodh stooped and lifted him; then he threw him upon the deerskins where Enya had lain.

“The bride-bed for you, Cathba,” said Aodh mockingly; “for me the bride.”

Outside the noise of spears and swords, and lamentation of men and women, and fierce cries, ceased. The hillman were few, or they would have burned the dún. But Firbis called for a truce, and bade Aodh take Enya of the Dark Eyes and go.

Thus was it that Aodh the Hill-King, Aodh the Singer, Aodh the Proud, won Enya whom he loved.

Yet he loved overmuch. It is not the way of kings, but Aodh was a poet, and he had the dream of dreams.

On the day when the Ardrigh of the Hill-Lands died, runners came to Aodh the Proud. He was to be Ardrigh. He sought Enya to tell her this thing; but she was in the woods, or upon the hills. So he fared eastward without seeing her whom he loved.

It was in the dún of the High King that he heard Cathba had laid waste his rath and carried captive away with him Enya of the Dark Eyes.

In a night and a day he was in his own lands

Enya of the Dark Eyes

again. At the call of Aodh the Proud the hill-clans gathered, and he came up with the warriors and prisoners of Cathba, where the mountains break. Then was fought the Battle of the Sloping Hill.

At the setting of the sun there were crowns lying there, idle gold in the yellow sand, and no man heeded them. And where the long grass waved there were women's breasts, so still in the brown silence, that the fluttering moths, which shake with the breaths of daisies, motionlessly poised their wings above where so many sighs once were, and where no more was any pulse of joy.

The noise of spears was silent. The wild-hawk, and not the javelin, hissed in the stillness. Ravens flew where the arrows had fallen into bloody pools.

The man who had made this slaughter stood alone in that place. The warriors were in the dark glens, beyond the stream below the hill-slope, thrusting spears into pale fugitives, and laughing as they tied white women by their long hair to the boles of the pines.

This was the man called Aodh the Proud.

Aodh searched the dead. First, he looked at all those who lay fallen head forward or with upturned face. Then, disdainfully, he

Enya of the Dark Eyes

turned over the bodies of those speared, or slain by arrow or javelin, from behind.

He found nowhere the body of Cathba.

That night they brought him a captive woman. She was old, but bought her life with what she had to tell: for that telling was of Enya.

Cathba had not been in the Battle of the Hill-Slope. He was now in the nearest of the forest-dûns of Enya's father.

Firbis the White had ever hated Aodh, and the old man's laughter was now as loud and as long as the baying of his wolf-hound. When she had left, the woman said, Enya was lying on the deerskins, playing with the long hair of Cathba.

"She was singing a song," added the woman.

"What song did she sing?" asked Aodh.

"It was a song of meeting winds, meeting waves, of day and night, of life and death; and at the end of each singing she sang:

*'I, Enya of the Dark Eyes, love but thee, and thee only, O dear one,
Man of my heart art thou, thee most do I love, thee only, O Dear one!'*"

Then Aodh the King knew what song Enya of the Dark Eyes had sung while she lay on

Enya of the Dark Eyes

the deerskins and played with the dark hair of Cathba, son of Cathba Mòr. It was a song he had heard when Enya of the Dark Eyes lay on the deerskins in the hill-dûn of him, 'Aodh the King, while she played with his long yellow hair.

Aodh the Proud turned and fared back alone through the field of the dead. But when the king came to his dûn, the women would not let him enter; for he was baying like a wolf, and shaking a bloody spear, and laughing wild, and calling to a star that was hanging low in the west, "*Enya, Enya, Enya! Enya, Enya, Enya!*"

And so he was king no longer. He was called the Laughing Man, for he could throw a spear no more, but often laughed idly, with a little foam ever upon his mouth. And at the last he ate roots, and went naked, and in the end was trampled to death by the wild swine.

That is the story of Aodh the Proud, who made deathless beauty out of the beauty and love of Enya of the Dark Eyes, who sang the same song to two men.

THE CRYING OF WIND

After the great and terrible Battle of the Field of Spears, Aodh the Harper, who was called 'Aodh-of-the-Songs, left the camps of men and went into the woods.

For a year and another season of snow he drifted hither and thither therein, a blown leaf. When he was seen again of his scattered folk, his brown hair was grey, and his eyes were as a woman's tired with weeping, and as a young man's weary with vain love, and as an old man's weary with life.

He came forth clad in a slit deerskin, and in his long grey locks were sprays of mistletoe, the moon-white berries like river-pearls in the grey ashes of his hair. Behind him lolled two gaunt wolves, staring ever upward at him with famished eyes.

When he came before the King, where Congal the Silent sat in his rath, listening to Barach the blind Druid, he stood still, looking out from his eyes as a man on a hill staring through the dusk at once familiar lands.

The Crying of the Wind

Congal looked at him.

“This is a good day that we see you again, Aodh-of-the-Songs.”

Aodh said nothing.

“It is a year and a fourth part of a year since you went into the forest and were lost there as a shadow is lost.”

Aodh answered nothing.

“In all that time have you known what we have not known?”

Aodh stirred and looked intently upon the king and upon the white hair and white face of Barach the Blind. Then he looked at the two gaunt wolves at his side, and he smiled.

“Aye, Congal, son of Artan, I have seen and I have heard.”

“And what will you have seen, and what heard?”

“I have heard the crying of wind.”

“That, too, we have heard. What is there in the crying of the wind that we have not heard?”

“I have heard the sigh of the grass.”

“That, too, we have heard. What is there in the sigh of the grass that we have not heard?”

“I have seen the dew falling from the stars, and like pale smoke the dew rising again to the

The Crying of the Wind

stars, till they were wet and bright as the scales of a salmon leaping in the moonshine."

"That also we have seen, Aodh-of-the-Harp."

"I have seen the coming and going of the stars."

"That also we have seen, Aodh."

"There is no more."

"Is there in truth no more to tell?"

"Only the crying of wind."

Congal the King sat in his place with brooding eyes. Aodh stood before him, seeing that which he had seen between the coming and going of stars.

"Play to us, Aodh-of-the-Woods."

Then Aodh took his harp and touched the strings, and sang:

I have fared far in the dim woods;
And I have known sorrow and grief,
And the incalculable years
That haunt the solitudes.
Where now are the multitudes
Of the Field of Spears?
Old tears
Fall upon them as rain,
Their eyes are quiet under the brown leaf.

I have seen the dead, innumerable:
I too shall lie thus,
And thou, Congal, thou too shalt lie
Still and white
Under the starry sky,

The Crying of the Wind

And rise no more to any Field of Spears,
But, under the brown leaf,
Remember grief
And the old, salt, bitter tears.

And I have heard the crying of wind.
It is the crying that is in my heart:
Oona of the Dark Eyes, Oona of the Dark Eyes,
Oona, Oona, Oona, Heart of my Heart!
But there is only the crying of wind
Through the silences of the sky,
Dews that fall and rise,
The faring of long years,
And the coverlet of the brown leaf
For the old familiar grief
And the old tears.

No man spoke when Aodh ceased singing and harping. All knew that when he had come back to the smoking, wasted rath of the King, after the Battle of the Field of Spears, he had found Oona of the Dark Eyes, whom he loved, slain with a spear betwixt the breasts. He had looked long upon her, but said nothing; and when that night she was put in the brown earth, white-robed, with white apple-blooms in her dusky hair, standing erect and proud as though she saw wise eyes fixed upon her, he made a song and a music for her, and then was silent till dawn. No man had heard so strange and wild music, and never had any listened to a song wherein the words

The Crying of the Wind

clanged and clashed heedlessly as the din of falling swords. On the morrow, Duach, a druid, had graven, in Ogam, her name on a stone. Aodh had stood by from dawn till the rising of the sun. Then he laughed low, and smoothed the stone with his hand, and whispered, "Come, White One, come." With that he passed into the woods.

On this day of his return he had gone straightway to the stone in the oak glade. "I come, White One, I come," he whispered there, smoothing the white stone with a slow, lingering hand.

When Aodh had turned thence to the rath, and was brought before Congal the Ardrigh, there was a shining in his face.

All knew what Aodh had sung of when he sang that song of grief at the bidding of the King. Thus it was that no man spoke. There was silence while slowly, as one in a dream, he touched now one string of his harp, now another.

Suddenly it was as though he awoke.

"Where are my three hounds?" he asked.

Congal looked at him with grave eyes.

"Great was your love, Aodh. None ever had greater love for a woman than was your love for Oona the Beautiful. But great sorrow has put a mist against your eyes."

The Crying of the Wind

"I hear the crying of wind, Congal."

"Ay?"

"And fair is the moon that I see sailing white and wonderful among the stars."

"There is no star yet but the Star of Fionn, and there is no moon, Aodh-of-the-Songs."

"Fair is the moon that I see sailing white and wonderful among the stars. Ah, white wonderful face of Beauty! Oona, Oona, Oona!"

The King was silent. None spoke.

"I hear the crying of wind, Congal."

"Ay?"

"Where are my three hounds, O King?"

"There were two wolves which came out of the forest with you—a wolf and a she-wolf. They are gone."

"There were three."

None answered.

"There were three, O King. And now one only abides with me."

"I see none, Aodh-of-the-Songs."

"There were three hounds with me, Congal, son of Artan. They are called Death, and Life, and Love."

"Two wolves only I saw."

"I hear the crying of wind, Congal the Silent."

"Ay?"

The Crying of the Wind

“In that crying I hear the baying of the two wolves whom ye saw. They are Death and Life. They roam the dark wood.”

“Is there a wolf or a hound here now, Aodh-of-the-Songs?”

Aodh answered nothing, for his head was sideways, and he listened, as a hart at a well.

Barach the Blind rose and spoke.

“There is a white hound beside him, O King.”

“Is it the hound Love?”

“It is the hound Love.”

There was silence. Then the King spoke.

“What is it that you hear, Aodh-of-the-Songs?”

“I hear the crying of wind.”

HONEY OF THE WILD BEES

Three years after Bobarân the Druid poet, surnamed Bobarân Bàn, Bobarân the White, left Innis Manainn for the isles of the north, word came to him from the Sacred Isle that he was to beware of three things: the thought in the brain of the swallow, the arrow in the tongue of the fish, and the honey of the wild bees.

This word came to Bobarân in the island that was called Emhain Abhlach, Emhain of the Apple Trees,¹ where he dwelled with his wards, the two children of Naois and Deirdrê:

¹ Emhain Abhlach, Emhain of the Apple Trees, was an ancient name of Arran in the Firth of Clyde. Gaer (Gaiar, Gaith) was the son, and Aebgreiné (Aevgrain), the Sunlike, was the daughter of the famous Deirdrê (Deardhuil, Darthool) and of Naois, the eldest of the sons of Usnach. The Sacred Isle, Manainn, *i.e.* the Isle of Manannan, is the Isle of Man. The Manannan introduced here is the semi-divine son (*i.e.* son in the sense of descent) of the great Manannan, god of the waters, son of Lir the ancient elemental God. The Innse Gall alluded to once or twice are the Hebrides (the Isles of the

Honey of the Wild Bees

Gaer, a youth already tall, comely and gracious, and lordly as a king's son; and Aevgrain, the Sunlike. The loveliness of Aevgrain was so fair to look upon, that she was held worthy to be the daughter of that Deirdrê whose beauty had set all the ancient world aflame.

When Bobarân the White received this message from Manannan mhic Manainn, Lord of the Sacred Isle and of the Isles of the Gall, he was troubled. That high king meant no juggling with words. Manannan knew that the Druid poet had the old wisdom of the symbols; and fearing lest any others might interpret his message, had sent warning to him in this guise. That, he understood. Manannan Mac-Athgno was old, and had knowledge of desires unaccomplished and of things unful-

Strangers). The Gall and the Gael were the two peoples of the north, the Gall being the Strangers or Scandinavians. The Ultonian King, Conchobar, referred to is, of course, that King of Ulster from whom Naois abducted Deirdrê; and whom, twenty years or more later, Gaer (Gaiar), the son of Deirdrê, ousted from sovereignty, and banished to the remote lands of Orcc and Catt (the Orkneys and Caithness), only, however, to recall him to the sovereignty after the space of a year, when Gaer returned to Emhain Ablach (Arran), to live there "in a dream" till he died.

Honey of the Wild Bees

filled: doubtless, then, he had foreseen some peril or other evil thing for Gaer or for Aevgrain, or for both the hapless children of Naois mhic Uisneach and Deirdrê.

Yet of the message Bobarân could make nothing. After long thought, he took his clârsach and went up through the ancient forest and out upon the desert of the great mountain which towers above all others in Emhain Ablach.

He played gently upon his clârsach as he went, so that no wild thing molested him. The brown wolves howled, and their fangs whitened under their red snouts; but all leaped aside, and slid snarling out of sight. The grey wolves stood silent, watching with fierce red eyes, but did not follow. When Bobarân came to the last tree of the forest, he looked behind him, and saw an old white wolf.

He stopped.

“Why do you follow me, O wolf?” he asked.

The wolf blinked at him, and sniffed idly the hillwind.

“Why do you follow me, O wolf?” Bobarân asked a second time. The old white wolf raised his head and howled.

Bobarân took from the hollow at the top of his clârsach nine shrunken red berries of

Honey of the Wild Bees

the rowan. Three he threw at the white wolf, and cried, "I put speech upon thine old wisdom." Three he threw into the air above his head, and cried, "Tear the mist, O wind." And three he put into his mouth, muttering, "By him of the Hazel-Tree, and by the Salmon of Knowledge, let seeing be upon me."

With that he asked for the third time, "Why do you follow me, O wolf?"

When the wolf spoke, it was with the tongue of men:

"The spring is come: the red fish is in the river again, the red tassel is on the larch, and the secret thought is in the brain of the swallow."

"There is no swallow yet on Emhain Abhlach, old wolf that has wisdom."

"There is even now a swallow making three flights above your head, and it will fall at your feet."

Bobarân saw a shadow circle thrice before his eyes, and before he could stir a swallow fell dead at his feet.

While it was yet warm he looked into the brain of the bird. Because of the three sacred berries he had swallowed, he saw. Then he was troubled because in that seeing he saw a wild boar turning at bay, and that Gaer the beautiful youth had fallen, and in his fall had

Honey of the Wild Bees

broken his spear, and that the boar blinked his red savage eyes and churned the foam between his great tusks, and made ready to rush upon him and slay Gaer the son of the Beautiful One, the king's son who should yet rule the Gaels of Eiré.

With that Bobarân struck three shrill cries from his clàrsach, and ran headlong westward through the forest. And where he lay upon the ground, Gaer looked and saw a dancing flame before him; and before the boar was a sudden rushing torrent, and midway was a whirling sword that made a continuous bewildering dazzle. And that dancing flame, and that rushing torrent, and that whirling sword, were the three shrill cries from the clàrsach of Bobarân the White.

This happened then: that when the Druid ran into the glade where Gaer lay, he took his clàrsach and played a spell upon the boar, so that the son of Naois rose, and lifted his broken spear, and strongly bound the two fragments together, and then with a great shout rushed upon the foam-clotted tusks and drove his spear through the red throat, so that it came out beyond the bristling fell, and passed the length of a handbreadth into the bole of an oak that was behind the boar.

That night, Bobarân and Gaer and Aevgrain

Honey of the Wild Bees

had great joy over the fires. Gaer played upon his clàrsach, and sang the chant of the death of the boar; and Bobarân sang the long tale of Naois, the first of the three heroes of Alba, and of his great love of Deirdrê; and Aevgrain, when the stars were come, and none saw her face in the shadow, sang the love-songs of Deirdrê, and the love-song that was in her own woman's heart.

The two men were troubled by the singing of Aevgrain; Bobarân the White because of memory, Gaer because of desire. When she sang no more, both sighed. "I hear the sound of the sea," said Gaer—"I hear the song of a blind bird," said Bobarân.—"I hear silence," whispered Aevgrain to herself, the blood going to her face lest even in that silence the secret thought in her heart should take wing, as the quiet owlet in the dusk.

But Bobarân was well pleased that night when the youth and the girl slept. For he had seen the thought in the brain of the swallow, that of which Manannan of Manainn had warned him. For now belike might the prophecy be fulfilled, that Gaer of the race of Usna and of the womb of Deirdrê should become the Ardrigh of the Gaels both of Eiré and of Alba. So he slept.

On the seventh day after that slaying of

Honey of the Wild Bees

the boar, Bobarân the White walked under the falling snow of the apple-bloom, in the shore-glades behind the great conical isle that was then called Inshroin, the Isle of the Seals.

He was looking idly seaward, when suddenly he stood as though arrow-fixed. In the bay was a long galley, shaped like a great fish, and with the bows disparted as the mouth of a speared salmon. It was a birlinn of the Innse Gall, and the coming of the sea-rovers might well be for evil.

He heard a strange music, but ear could not tell whence it came, for it was as a sweet perplexing swarm of delicate sounds; and was in the spires of the grass, and the blown drift of the thistle-down, and the bells of the fox-glove, and in all the murmurous multitude of the little leaves.

So by that he knew it was a magic song. He took his clàrsach, and played an old rune of the sea, that Manannan of Manainn had taught him: Manannan, the son of Athgno, of the sons of Manannan of the Foam, son of Lir, the great god.

And when he had played, he took nine shrivelled berries of the rowan from the top of his clàrsach. Three he threw toward the waves, and cried:

Honey of the Wild Bees

“O Element that is older than the ancient earth!
O Element that was old when Age was young!
O second of the Sacred Three in whom the seed of
Alldai,
In whom the seed of the Unnameable became the
spawn of the world,
Whence the old gods, and the fair Dedannans, and
the sons of men—
O Element of the Elements, show me the fish of
Manainn,
Show me the fish of Manannan with the arrow in
the tongue!”

And when Bobarân had cried this incantation, he took three more of the rowan berries and threw them on the ground, and they were swift red tongues of hounds that bayed against a shadowy deer. Then, when he had swallowed the three remaining rowan berries, he saw Gaer standing by a rock on the shore, now looking toward the galley—whence came, as a swarm of bees, the perplexing sweet murmurous noise—and now back to the woodland where he heard the glad baying of hounds lair-ing the deer.

But while Bobarân wondered, he saw a beautiful naked woman standing in the prow of the birlinn, and striking the strings of a small shell harp, and singing. And when he looked at Gaer, the son of Naois was in the sea, and swimming swiftly from wave to

Honey of the Wild Bees

wave, crying the name of her who bore him—
Deirdrê, flame of love.

But the druid saw that the beautiful woman was an evil Queen; and that in the hollow of the fish-mouth crouched a man of Lochlin, with a stretched bow in his hands, and in that bow a great arrow.

So once more he cried:

“O Element, in the name of Manannan, son of Lîr!”

and then he lifted his clàrsach, and struck three shrill cries from the strings.

Thus it was that where Gaer swam against the sweet lust of his eyes three great waves arose. The first wave bore him down into the depths, so that the arrow that flew against his breast shot like a shadow through the water. The second wave whirled him this way and that, so that the arrow that flew against his back shot like a spent mackerel through the spray. The third wave hurled him on the shore, amid clouds of sand.

Bobarân fled to the place where he fell, and stood before him, and played a wind against the arrows that now came from the birlinn like rain. Then he played magic upon the sea, so that the three tidal waves became one, and roared seaward in one high, terrible, crested, overpowering tumult, and lifted the

Honey of the Wild Bees

birlinn, and hurled it upon the rocks of Insh-roin, so that all there were swept into the sea and drowned.

Then Bobarân was glad, because he remembered what he had heard in Inis-Manainn—that a fair queen of the Innse Gall would seek to lure Gaer the son of Deirdrê to his death, because of what Naois and the sons of Usnach had done to her kinsfolk of the far isles.

That night, before the fires, he told of the hero-wars of Naois and the sons of Usna, and of how the queen of the Innse Gall came in her beauty to Naois, and of how Naois looked at Deirdrê, and bade depart the yellow-haired woman with the yellow crown. Then because he was a poet he sang of her beauty, and of the infinite bitter sweetness of desire, and of the long ache and continuous unsatisfied longing that is called love.

When he ceased, he saw that neither Gaer nor Aevgrain listened to his singing voice. But in the eyes of Gaer he saw the infinite bitter sweetness of desire, and in the eyes of Aevgrain the ache and longing of unawakened love.

On the morrow, Bobarân was walking, heavy with thought. Peradventure the day was near when another evil would come to the children of Naois and of Deirdrê. He feared,

Honey of the Wild Bees

too, lest he had lit a fire in the mind of Gaer and in the heart of Aevgrain.

While he was yet pondering what thus perplexed him, he saw three drawing near. One was Aevgrain, sunlike indeed in her lovely beauty, but with strange, grave eyes; and one was Gaer coming as Naois when he was seen of Deirdrê in the woods of Conchobar, laughing with delight; and one was a young man, the fairest and comeliest Bobarân the White had ever seen. He was clad in green, with a fillet of gold, with belt-clasps of shining findruiney. His hair was long and yellow, yet he was not of the men of Lochlin.

He bowed courteously as he drew near. Bobarân saw that he threw three berries of the mistletoe on the ground, and asked him concerning these, and that doing.

"It is my *geas*, my vow," said the stranger. "It is one of my *geasan* that I throw three berries of the mistletoe on the ground before I speak to an honourable one of the druids."

Bobarân accepted that saying, for it was in the manner of his day.

And because that he himself was under *geas* not to ask a stranger more than two questions, he spoke at once, lest idly he should ask a vain thing.

Honey of the Wild Bees

“Are you of Emhain Abhlach, fair lord?” he asked.

“Yes, I am of the Isle of the Apple Trees,” answered the stranger, with grave eyes.

“And your name and your father’s name, are they known to me?”

“I am Rinn, the son of Eochaidh Iuil.”

“Doubtless Eochaidh Iuil is a king in . . . in . . .”

“What of your *geas*, O Bobarân-Bàn?”

At this the druid bowed ashamedly, for he had broken his *geas*. He stood amazed, too, that Rinn, the son of Eochaidh, should know what that *geas* was.

“I am come here,” said Rinn slowly, “because I follow the shadow of my dream.” The druid thought he had heard no voice so sweet since Deirdrê sang low as she played at chess with Naois.

“That was when Gaer was asleep within her womb,” said Rinn.

So, knowing that the stranger could read what was in his mind, Bobarân feared the magic of spells. But when he put his hand to his side, he found that his clàrsach was gone; and when he looked, he saw that Rinn had lifted it from the ground; and when he strove to speak, he understood that by the third berry

Honey of the Wild Bees

of the mistletoe the stranger had put silence against his lips.

So, with a heavy heart, he turned and followed the three to the pleasant *lios* which at that season was their home.

At dusk, before the fires, Rinn sang and told fair wonderful tales. And when he had told one tale, Gaer knew that it was of him he spoke: and of how on the morrow he would cross the sea to Eiré and contest with Conchobar, who had been the deathmaker for his love Deirdrê and for Naois and the sons of Usnach, for the sovereignty of the Ultonians: and of how he would banish Conchobar to the far surf-swept Isles of Orcc: and of how, after a year of sovereignty, and because of the longing of love and the dream of all dreams, he would return to Emhain Abhlach, and recall Conchobar to be Ardrigh: and of how he would live there till he died, and of how he would know love great as the love of Naois, and beauty great as the beauty of Deirdrê.

And in that dream sleep came upon him, and when Gaer slept, Rinn took the *clàrsach* again, and again played. He sang the song of love. Bobarân saw a forest glade filled with moonshine, and in that moonshine was a woman, white and beautiful, and the face was the face of Alveen whom he had loved. His

Honey of the Wild Bees

heart rose like a wave: his life swung on the crest of that wave: and as a wave he broke in a flood of longing and desire at the feet of Alveen whom he had loved long, long ago.

And in that dream sleep came upon him, and he knew no more.

When Bobarân slept, Rinn looked at Aevgrain, whose eyes were shining upon him as two stars.

“Play me no sweet songs, O Rinn,” she murmured, “for already I love you, O heart’s desire, my delight!”

Rinn smiled, but he touched the strings of his harp.

“O heart’s desire, my delight!” he whispered.

“O heart’s desire!” she murmured, as sleep came upon her. Then her white hands moved like swans through the shadowy flood that was her hair, and she put sleep from her, and leaned forward, looking into the eyes of Rinn.

“Tell me who you are, whence you are,” she whispered.

“Will you love me if I tell this thing?”

“You are my heart’s desire.”

“Will you follow me if I tell this thing?”

Aevgrain rose. The firelight waved a rose of flame into her face.

Honey of the Wild Bees

Rinn laughed low, and he put his arms about her and led her deeper into the shadow of the lios.

At sunrise Manannan stood on the shore, and when he looked along the sun-track he saw Gaer sailing into the west.

Then he went to the lios. There was no one there: there was no single thing to be seen there save two pale blue shadows lying in the sunway.

Then he awoke Bobarân.

“Put that youth-dream from you,” he said, “and answer me. Where is Gaer? Where is Aevgrain?”

Bobarân bowed his head.

“What of the wild-boar that was the peril of Gaer, that was the thought in the brain of the swallow?”

“It is slain, O Manannan of Manainn.”

“What of the white woman and the death-shaft that was the arrow in the tongue of the fish?”

“They are in the silence of the sea.”

“What of the witching voice of Rinn, the Lord of Shadow, Rinn the son of Eochaidh Iuil, of the Land of Heart's Desire? What of his witching song, that is called Honey of the Wild Bees?”

Bobarân the Druid bowed his head.

Honey of the Wild Bees

“ He put his spells upon me and upon Gaer. I know no more.”

“ Gaer you shall see once more, for he will come again to Emhain Abhlach, but he will not know you, for you shall be a grey wolf howling in the waste. But Aevgrain we shall not see again. Farewell, O daughter of Deirdrê, desire of my desire!”

And with that Manannan turned, and was hidden in a sea-mist, and was in Manainn again, the Sacred Isle.

But already Bobarân had not waited for that going. His fell bristled as he leaped past the lios, and his long howl rose and sank till lost in the silence of the woods.

At sundown on the third day the two shadows in the lios stirred. Sweet clay of the world was upon them again.

“ Tell me what you are, whence you are,” murmured Aevgrain, her eyes shadowy with love.

“ Will you love me if I tell this thing? ”

“ You are my heart’s desire.”

“ Will you follow? ”

Aevgrain strove to rise. The sunflood warmed a rose of flame in her pale face:

“ I love you, Aevgrain, because you are beautiful, and because in you I see the shadow of beauty. Await here. It is my will.”

Honey of the Wild Bees

"I have no love but you. You are my heart's desire."

Rinn sighed.

"So be it," he said. "I will take with me your love. Overlong have I dreamed this dream. Hark to that great sighing!"

"I hear."

"It is the sighing of the world. It is for me."

"For you——?"

"I am called Rinn, Honey of the Wild Bees. I am the Lord of Shadow. But here, O Aevgrain, my name is Death."

THE BIRDS OF EMAR¹

When Cairill, King of the southlands of Albryn that are washed by the unquiet waters of the Moyle, was hunting, in a lonely place and with only one hound, he found that the two lives that are one life may touch and be at one.

He was stooping over the print of a doe in the bracken, when his hound leaped aside and fled swiftly by the way they had come. Cairill stared, then moved back a spray of mistletoe which hung from the oak where he leaned. He heard a crackle under his feet, and saw a long, narrow ash-shaft break in two: and his feet trod upon the white hands of a man lying asleep. The man was young. He was clad in green, with a gold chain round his neck, with breast-bosses, necklet, and anklets of pale findruiney. When he rose, he was tall, lithe

¹ For the original version of one or two episodes in these old dreams redreamed, and fashioned anew, the reader is referred to the Mabinogi of Pwyll, to the Mabinogi of Branwen, and to the Mabinogi of Manwyddan.

The Birds of Emar

as a sapling, his face young and smooth as a girl's, his hair yellow-white like the bog-cotton in the shine of the sun.

Cairill looked at him.

"Though you are welcome to see," he said, "I do not know your face."

"I know yours, Cairill mac Cairill. And because you have put this slight upon me I will do a hurt to your kingship."

"What hurt will you do, and who are you to do a hurt to Cairill Swiftspear?"

"I am Keevan of Emhain Abhlach.¹ I can put any evil upon you. But it is my *geas* not to put evil upon any one who has meant me no evil."

"It is my *geas* to refuse no courteous, kingly offer in place of death or shame."

"That is well. You have done me a wrong by that treading upon me. I am not of your human clan. That tread shall be a bruise upon me for a year and a day. But let it be thus. For a year and a day I will take your shape upon me, and you will take mine; and I will go to Caer Charill, and you will go to Emhain

¹ Ciabhan. Emhain Abhlach, the ancient Gaelic name of Arran, is also the Scottish equivalent of the Isle of Avalon. Both names mean the Isle of Appletrees. Ciabhan would therefore be a prince of Faery.

The Birds of Emar

Abhlach: and no one shall know this thing, neither your queen nor any of my lordly folk, nor your dogs nor mine, nor your sword nor my sword, nor spear, nor drinking-shell, nor clársach nor tympan."

"And what have I to fear in this?"

"I have a foe, Fergal. Beware of Fergal at the rising of the moon. And what have I to fear with you?"

"The love of Dorcha, who is my leman."

Keevan laughed.

"That is everywhere," he said; "among the dragons in the stars and the worms in the earth."

"And how shall I know that this is only for a year and a day, Keevan Honey-mouth?"

"I swear it by the seven universal things: by the sun and by the moon, by flame and wind and water, the dew, and day and night."

With that they changed shapes, and Keevan went back to Caer Charill, and none knew him from Cairill, not even Dorcha when he lay with her, and she looked at him darkly, while he slept: and, in Emhain Abhlach, none knew Cairill to be other than Keevan, not even Keevan's wife, Malveen of the Honey Hair.

Thus was it for a year and a day.

Before the third quarter of that year, Dorcha put a serpent in a pillow of moss, and lay

The Birds of Emar

by Keevan to see him die. But the fierce worm knew his kindred, and whispered in Keevan's ear. That whispering made a dream. Keevan rose, and took a reed with holes in it from the wall: and played silence and stillness on Dorcha, and so the serpent stained her white breast with its milk-white teeth, and at that little red spot she died.

And before the third quarter of that year, when, after a long hunting, Cairill lay by Malveen of the Honey Hair, Keevan's wife rose, and made a sign to Fergal. It was at the lifting of the moon. He stood in the shadow of an old oak, and the bow was drawn so that it hummed in the wind like a gnat, and an arrow was in that bow, and the arrow had the poison of moonseed that even the Tuathe Dé fear at the rising of the moon.

But the serpent in Keevan's ear had whispered this also: therefore he played a dream into Cairill's mind: thus the strayed king dreamed, and knew that dream for a divination. So Cairill rose, and threw his green cloak about Malveen, and bade her look if the moon had reached its third change of gold. She looked, and the arrow of Fergal went into her breast, and the moonseed moved into her heart, and she died.

Fergal came near, laughing low. "There

The Birds of Emar

will be lamentation in Faery," he said, "but you will be my queen now, Malveen of the Honey Hair."

"Yes," said Cairill, who had taken the arrow from Malveen's breast, "there will be lamentation in Faery."

And with that he flung the arrow at Fergal, and it entered into his eye, so that he knew darkness and silence and was no more.

At dawn the folk of Emhain Abhlach buried them, in hollowed places under running water, with two flat stones above them pointed flow-ward.

That night Cairill sat alone. Old dreams were with him. Greatly he longed.

A woman drew near. She was as white and wonderful as moonflame with the evening star in it. She had hair dusky and soft as the long, warm shadows of afternoon. Her eyes were more darkly blue than the wing of the kingfisher, and the light in them was like the dew that hangs in speedwells. Her hands were so white that when she played upon her little gold clàrsach they were the foam of waves in moonshine. Through the green grass her feet moved, wandering lilies.

She played a song upon Cairill.

It was so passing sweet that his life died to a breath.

The Birds of Emar

“What is the song?” he said.

“The song of longing,” she said. Her voice was as an eddy of twilight air above white clover.

She played again. It was so wild a music that the blood clanged against his heart like a storm of swords against a shield.

“What is that song?” he asked.

“The song of desire,” she said. Her voice was as the gathering of wind in woods.

She played again. He heard the waves of the sea lapping the snows on the summits of great hills, and all the white sap and green wonder of the earth moving into flame, and betwixt sun and moon the myriad tempest of the snow of stars.

“What is that song?” he asked.

“The song of love,” she said. Her voice was as the still breath of a flower.

“My name is Emar,” she whispered, “and I will come again. You are my desire and my one love.”

But he did not see her again till he was once more in *Caer Charill*, and *Keevan* was in his own shape and in *Emhain Abhlach* again.

One day, when he was throwing javelins at an oaken disc, he saw a woman. She was more beautiful than any woman he had seen. She was fair as *Emar*, but her beauty was the

The Birds of Emar

beauty of a woman and not of those behind the dew and the moonshine.

“Who and whence are you, O fair one?” he asked.

“I am Emar,” she said. Then she wooed him, and he made her his queen.

At the marriage feast a stranger rose.

He put down his drinking-shell, and when he spoke his voice made a sound like a distant horn against the shields on the wall.

“I claim a boon,” he said.

“It is my *geas* not to refuse a boon to a stranger,” said Cairill.

“I am Balva of Emhain Abhlach. Emar put love upon me long ago. I claim her as my boon.”

Cairill rose.

“Take my life,” he said.

But Emar went to his side. “Not so,” she said. Then she turned to Balva.

“This day year you may come again.” With that he smiled, and gave that respite, and went away.

But in that year Cairill and Emar knew the depth and wonder of love. “I must go, but I will come again,” she said, when the day drew near. Then she told Cairill what to do.

On the dusk of the day when Balva came again and took Emar with him, Cairill put

The Birds of Emar

dew on his eyelids, and made a twisted wand out of withes of hazel and rowan, and at the rising of the moon went forth, disguised as a blind beggar playing on a reed-flute.

When he came upon Balva and Emar, Balva spoke.

“That is a sweet-singing flute, Blind One. If you will give it to me, I will give you your heart’s desire. That is my *geas*, if I ask for a flute, a falcon, a hound, or a woman.”

Cairill laughed. He put his blindness from him. “Give me Emar,” he said.

For a year thereafter Cairill and Emar knew deep joy.

On the night when labour came upon her, a wind struck the place where she lay, and the child was whirled away like a blown leaf. Cairill was wrought with anger and grief, but Emar said no word. She dreamed against the dawn.

At dawn a young man approached them. He was more fair than any man Cairill had ever seen, fairer than Balva, fairer than Keevan. He came like spring through green woods.

“The hour is come,” he said, looking at Emar.

“The hour is come,” he said again, looking at Cairill.

The Birds of Emar

“Who is this grown man of youth, with the beautiful years upon him?” asked Cairill.

“It is our son Ailill,” answered Emar, “he who was born last night.”

Emar rose and kissed Cairill on the lips. “Farewell, dear mortal love,” she said.

Then Ailill took the reed-flute wherewith Cairill had won Emar again, and played old age upon Cairill, so that he grew white, and withered as an elm-leaf. When he was but a shadow, Ailill played away the shadow of that shadow, and then the idle breath went out upon the wind.

II

Ailill brought fruit to Emar, and he gave her a flower that he had in his hair. She knew the smell of that flower, where it grew in Emhain Abhlach: and she had eaten of that fruit when she had known immortal things.

For an hour she and Ailill talked of mysteries, and of beauty.

“You have forgotten much,” he said: “since you ask me why that I have my comely manhood upon me when you bore me only last night.”

“I asked as a woman, Ailill. I bore you.”

The Birds of Emar

He smiled.

“If, last night, you had put dew in your hand, and let a ray of the Secret Star fall into it, you would have known. I was a long way from here when I heard you calling. As I came, the wind wore me to a shadow. When I was beside you, I was a little eddy of air. Then the Haughty Father breathed, and I was in his breath, and the breath quickened that which was within you. When Balva snatched me away he flung me at the feet of Him who is the mystery of the Red and White and Black: and my mortal clay was like the old wax of bees: and that you have Ailill for son is because Angus and Midir, who loved you long, long ago, and ever love you, came between me and the wind.”

“I remember,” said Emar softly.

“Angus lifted me. ‘He is mine,’ he said, ‘because he is the child of love, that is all in all because it is love. And he is mine, because those who die young are mine. And he is mine, because I am the Dart-thrower.’

“Midir, who wore a cloak of green leaves, with the veins under his earth-brown skin filled with white sap, lifted the ash-staff he carried. At the end of it was a little moon-white flame. This he put to the clay that was as the old wax of bees: and I felt the sap rise

The Birds of Emar

and the blood flow, and I was on my feet, leaning against the tree into which Midir had gone, as the wind goes into grass, and looking into the sky where I saw Angus the Helmsman sitting in the Great Galley, and singing as he sailed along the shining coasts of the stars."

Emar leaned and kissed Ailill. "Then you came to me, my dream?"

"Yes. And because we are of the kin of Angus, the dream that we dream is beyond the thrust of the spear."

Then Emar and Ailill talked of secret things.

At noon, that is at the hours of hours, they rose and went out into the world. None went with them but the three birds, under a spell of sleep, which Ailill had brought to Emar from Angus, who loved her.

They fared far. One day they came to the City of the Rock, and stayed there for seven days. These were seven years, in the reckoning of men. For seven days they stayed there, listening to the song of the three birds of Emar.

Then they left the City of the Rock, and fared north.

One day, at dawn, in a wood, they saw a fair girl herding milch-deer, with two fawns

The Birds of Emar

by her side. Emar saw a flush come into Ailill's face, and his eyes shone. One of the sleeping birds flew, and hovered above the fawns, singing. The girl lifted her face, and her eyes saw Ailill, and she grew white with immortal love, and shadows came into her eyes.

"I am Muireall," she said, "the daughter of Eoan and Finola, and am of the old race, as I see you are, Emar daughter of him of the grey dominions, and, Ailill son of Emar."

Then they knew that the bird had sung their names. She took them to her grianân on a sun-swept mound in the wood. Her father lay there. Long ago he had eaten mistletoe-berries in moonshine, and had not waked again. Finola, loving him more than life, had changed herself into the white stillness of sleep, and was a dream in his mind, and lay quiet and glad and at rest.

For seven days, that were years, Emar and Ailill stayed with Muireall in the grianân. Ailill learned the three songs of Angus. There is no joy and no wonder like that joy and that wonder.

At the end of that time Eoan heard the singing of Emar's birds, and rose. Finola was still a dream in his mind, but she too

The Birds of Emar

waked and stood beside him, lovely in changeless youth.

On the morrow Emar and Ailill and Muir-eall left the grianân in the wood. They went into the world and wandered many days. They followed the stars called the Hounds, that point to the North Star. They saw none but shepherds and wandering folk.

One night, in a wood of old lichened trees, they met a god, with the head and breast of a hawk. His eyes were terrible, but he did not speak to them, nor do evil. They followed him, and came to a place where he crouched and worshipped. They saw nothing but an ancient flat stone, above which, though there was no wind, a maze of dead leaves whirled ceaselessly.

Three days after that they heard the inland sigh of the sea. It was among dry trees and bent grass. The shadows of seabirds often were, and in a moment were not, on green slopes.

At sundown they came suddenly upon a sandy dune, and saw a man walking swiftly. He was fair and wonderful. Two waves ran behind him like hounds. By these, and by the foambells on his sunbright locks, Ailill knew that he was Manànn the son of Manànn mac Lir.

The Birds of Emar.

There was great joy in that meeting. Manànn looked on Emar, and knew that he need dream no more. He took them to a sun-filled cave by the sea, and gave them food and drink. Ailill bestowed Emar upon him, and Emar and Manànn loved as Ailill and Muireall loved.

They dwelled together for seven days that are years, while the birds of Emar sang.

One day, at the end of that time, Dalua, the Amadan Dhu, passed that way and looked at them as they slept. The two waves of Manànn were blind too, flat and motionless.

Long ago he too had loved Emar. But Manànn had slighted him, and Manànn mac Lir had banned him from the sea.

He took his reed-pipe and played softly. He played silence upon the two waves: deep sleep upon the sleepers. Then he changed one of the singing birds of Emar into a swallow, and it flew to the south: and another to a cuckoo, and it flew to the west: and the third to a crane, and it flew to the east. Then out of the north he brought a swarm of crows and told them to eat up the land and the ripe grain. Then Dalua took his reed again, and played one of the songs that are older than the Tuatha Dé.

When Manànn and Ailill and Muireall woke

The Birds of Emar

they heard no singing of the birds, and saw that Emar was no longer with them. The land was already desolate.

“Dalua has done this,” said Manànn, frowning with black rage: “and we shall all know death if we do not move to where life is. The crows eat up the grain, and a blight is on every green thing, and on the earth.”

As they passed from the cave, Muireall looked longingly at a white flower that grew in a little sunlit space of soft grass and sea-pinks. But her heart was too heavy to pluck it.

It was Emar, whom Dalua had thus changed, and himself into the green stalk with grey silky petals which enclosed and upheld her.

But by the loss of the birds, and through the spells of Dalua, they were as folk of perishing clay again.

After many wanderings, for many seasons, wherein Manànn made baskets and other wicker-woven things, while Muireall sang, and Ailill played upon a tympan, and so thus won food and shelter, they came again to the Alban southlands, and to Solway shores.

The wind and tide were from the south: and when Manànn lifted the foam to his brow he had his old powers again, and when he

The Birds of Emar

looked behind him he saw his two following waves, leaping and playing upon the yellow sands.

But Ailill and Muireall were sad, because to them no change came. On the morrow a worse evil chanced: for as they walked silently through a wood, the tribesmen of Scarva, who had usurped the kingship of that realm, took them captive, and they were thrown into a dark hollow in the rock on which Dun Scarva was built.

Scarva and Gâra his wife would have been glad to take Manànn also, but could not. One day he was walking in the wood, and saw a white fawn running through the bracken. He sent his two waves after it, for he knew it was Gâra, and that she had hoped to wile him to throw the one spear he carried. The two waves came upon her, and she would have died drowning, but that she cried for mercy. Manànn spared her, if she would swear by the sun and by the moon, by flame and wind and water, by the dew, and by day and night, that Ailill and Muireall should be set free. Further, that Scarva should give to him for three days, and a day and a night, the White Hound he kept, which Myrlyn had given him because of a service.

And that was done.

The Birds of Emar

On the first day, the White Hound led Manànn and Ailill and Muireall through an enchanted forest down to the sea, and thence by a secret way to the Isle of Manànn mac Lír; so that Manànn went to and fro again in his own land.

On the second day, the White Hound swam before the galley in which Ailill sat alone, and led him and the two following waves of Manànn to Emhain Abhlach, where he too was in his own land.

On the third day, the White Hound led Ailill through a wood to where Dalua slept, with his hazel-wand on the moss, and with Emar by his side.

Ailill lifted the wand and waved silence and trance upon Dalua. In that moment Dalua dreamed, and because of his shifting dream Emar was changed into a white flower, and lay upon his breast. But Ailill plucked the flower, and whispered, and Emar stood beside him again, fair and wonderful, with dark immortal eyes.

Before Emar and Ailill went, with the two waves of Manànn, and the three birds, red, and white, and black, Ailill waved "following" upon Dalua, so that he rose and followed the White Hound. All that night and all the next day they moved swiftly across

The Birds of Emar

unknown ways, till they reached the edge of the world.

It was then that the spell passed from him, and he waked, and looked down into the abyss where the stars were shining.

Then Dalua wept, because of that infinitude, and because he knew that a thousand years would pass before he could win his way again to Emhain Abhlach.

On the night of that day, which was the end of the three days and a night and a day, Scarva the Ardrigh waked suddenly, for he heard the baying of the White Hound. And when he let the hound in, the hound lay down and died. There was a black spot on the whiteness between his red eyes.

“What is that?” asked the King of a druid who knew mysteries.

“It is the touch of Dalua,” said the druid. “It is the touch of Dalua, the Amadan Dhu, that gives madness or death.”

And still the birds of Emar sing old forgotten songs that are for ever new: and there is none that may not hear, at the rising of the moon, in the falling of the dew, amid the greening of the world.

Ulad of the Dreams

I

THE MELANCHOLY OF ULAD

In the sea-loch now known as that of Tarbert of Loch Fyne, but in the old far-off days named the Haven of the Foray, there was once a grianân, a sunbower, of so great a beauty that thereto the strings of the singing men's clàrsachs vibrated even in far-away Ireland.

This was in the days before the yellow-haired men of Lochlin came swarming in their galleys, along the lochs and fjords of the west. So long ago was it that none knows if Ulad sang his song to Fand before Diarmid the Fair was slain on the narrow place between the two lochs, or if it were when Colum's white robes were wont to come out of the open sea up the Loch of the Swans, that is now West Loch Tarbert, so as to reach the inlands.

Ulad of the Dreams

But of what import the witherset of by-gone days, where the tale of the years and of the generations is as that of autumn's leaves?

Ulad was there, the poet-king; and Fand, whom he loved; and Life and Death.

None knows whence Ulad came. In the Isles of the West men said he was a prince out of the realm of the Ultonians; but there, in the north of Eiré, they said he was a king in the southlands. Art the White, the wise old Ardrigh of the peoples who dwelled among the lake-lands far south, spoke of Ulad as one born under a solitary star on the night of the Festival of Beltane, and told that he came out of an ancient land north or south of Muirnick, the sea which has the feet of Wales and Cornwall upon its sunrise side, and the rocks and sands of Armorica upon that where the light reddens the west. But upon Ioua, that is now Iona, there was one wiser even than Art the White—Dùach the Druid; and when questioned as to Ulad the poet-king, he said he was of the ancient people that dwelt among the inlands of Alba, the old race that had known the divine folk, the Tuatha-de-Danànn, when they were seen of men, and no mortality was upon their sweet clay. The islanders were awed by what Dùach told them; for what manner of man could this be who had seen Merlin going

Ulad of the Dreams

tranced through the woods, playing upon a reed, with wolves fawning upon him, and the noise of eagles' wings ruffling the glooms of the forest overhead?

And of Fand, has even the secret wind an echo? Bêl the Harper, whose songs and playing made women's hearts melt like wax, and in men wrought either intolerable longing or put sudden swift flames into the blood, sang of her. And what he sang was this: that Ulad had fared once to Hy Bràsil, and had there beheld a garth of white blooms, fragrant and wonderful, under the hither base of a rainbow. These flowers he had gathered, and warmed all night against his breast, and at the thinning of the dark breathed into them. When the sunbreak slid a rising line along the dawn he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand. What had been white blooms, made rosy with his breath and warm against his side, was a woman. It was Fand.

Who, then, can tell whether Ulad were old or young when he came to the Haven of the Foray? He had the old ancient wisdom, and mayhap knew how to wrap himself round with the green life that endures.

None knew of his being in that place, till, one set of a disastrous day, a birlinn drove in before the tempest sweeping from the isle of

Ulad of the Dreams

Arran up the great sea-loch of Fionn. The oarsmen drew breath when the headlands were past, and then stared with amaze. Over-against the bay in the little rocky promontory on the north side was a house built wondrously, and that where no house had stood, and after a fashion that not one of them had seen. All marvelled with wide eyes. The sunset flamed upon it, so that its shining walls were glorious. A small round grianân it was, but built all of blocks and stones of hill-crystal, and upborne upon four great pine-boles driven deep into the tangled grass and sand, with these hung about with deerskins and fells of wolf and other savagery.

Before this grianân the men in the birlinn, upon whom silence had fallen, and whose listless oars made no lapping upon the foam-white small leaping waves of the haven, beheld a man lying face downward.

For a time they thought the man was dead. It was one, they said, some great one, who had perished at the feet of his desire. Others thought he was a king who had come there to die alone, as Conn the Solitary had done, when he had known all that man can know. And some feared that the prone man was a demon, and the shining grianân a dreadful place of spells. The howling of a wolf, in the oppo-

Ulad of the Dreams

site glen that is called Strathnamara, brought sweat upon their backs; for when the half-human wish evil upon men, they hide their faces, and the howling of a she-wolf is heard.

But of a sudden the helmsman made a sign. "It is Ulad the Wonder-Smith," he whispered hoarsely, because of the salt in his throat after that day of flight and long weariness; "it is Ulad of the Dreams." Then all there were glad, for each man knew that Ulad the Wonder-Smith, who was a poet and a king, wrought no ill against any clan, and that wherever he was the swords slept.

Nevertheless they marvelled much that he was there alone, and in that silence, with his face prone upon the wilderness, while the sunset flamed overagainst the grianân that was now like wine, or like springing blood, light and wonderful. But as tide and wind brought the birlinn close upon the shore, they heard a twofold noise, a rumour of strange sound. One looked at the other with amaze that grew into fear. For the twofold sound was of the muffled sobs and prayers of the man who lay upon the grass, and of the laughter of the woman who was unseen, but who was within the grianân.

Ulad of the Dreams

Donncha, the helmsman and leader of the seafarers, waved to his fellows to pull the birlinn close in among the weedy masses which hung from the rocks. When the galley lay there, all but hidden, and each man's head was beneath the wrack, Connla rose. Slowly he moved to where Ulad lay, face downward, upon the silt of sand and broken rock that was in front of the grianân. But before he could speak, the young king rose, though not seeing the newcomer, and looking upon the sun-bower, whence the laughter suddenly ceased, raised his arms.

Then, when he had raised his arms, song was upon his lips. It was a strange chant that Connla heard, and had the sound in it of the wind far out at sea, or of a tempest moving across treeless moors, mournful, wild, filled with ancient sorrow and a crying that none might interpret. The words of it, familiar to the helmsman, and yet with a strange lip-life upon them, were as these:

“Ah, you in the grianân there, whose laughter is on
me as fire-flames,
What of my sorrow of sorrows because of my
loving—
You that came to me out of the place where the
rainbows are builded,
Is it woman you are, O Fand, who laughest up
there in thy silence?

Ulad of the Dreams

Sure, I have loved thee through storm and peace,
through the day and the night;
Sure, I have turned my singing of songs to a
marvellous swan-song for thee;
And death have I dared, and life have I dared, and
gloom and the grave,
And yet, O Fand, thou laughest down on my pain,
on my pain, O Fand.

All things have I thrown away gladly only to win
thee—
Kingship and lordship of men, the fame of the
sword, and all good things—
For in thee at the last, I dreamed, in thee, O Fand,
Queen of Women,
I had found all that a man may find, and was as
the gods who die not.

But what of all this to me, who am Ulad the King,
the Harper,
Ulad the Singer of Songs that are fire in the hearts
of the hearers,
Ulad the Wonder-Smith, who can bridle the winds
and the billows,
Lay waste the greatest of dûns or build grianâns
here in the wilds—

What of all this to me, who am only a man that
seeketh,
Who seeketh for ever and ever the Soul that is
fellow to his—
The Soul that is thee, O Fand, who wert born of
flowers 'neath the rainbow,
Breathed with my breath, warmed at my breast,
O Fand, whom I love, and I worship?

Ulad of the Dreams

For all things are vain unto me, but one thing only,
and that not vain is—

My Dream, my Passion, my Hope, my Fand,
whom I won from Hy Bràsil:

O Dream of my life, my Glory, O Rose of the World,
my Dream,

Lo, death for Ulad the King, if thou failest, for all
that I am of the Dànann who die not."

And when he had chanted these words, Ulad, who was young and wondrous fair to look upon, held out his arms to Fand, whom yet he did not see, for she was within the grianân.

"Then, if even not now at the setting of the day," the king muttered, "patience shall be upon me till the coming of a new day, when it may be that Fand will hear my prayer."

And so the night fell. But as the screaming of gulls came over the loch, and the plaintive crying of lapwings was upon the moorland, and the smell of loneroid and bracken was heavy in the wind-fallen stillness, Ulad turned, and stared with wild eyes, for he felt a touch upon his shoulder.

It was Connla who touched him, and he knew the man. He had the old wisdom of knowing all that is in the mind by looking into the eyes and he knew how the man had come there.

"Let the men who are your men, O Connla,

Ulad of the Dreams

move away from here in their birlinn, and go further up into the haven."

And because he was a Wonder-Smith the islander did as Ulad bade, and without question. But when they were alone again, he spoke—

"Ulad, great lord, I am a man who is as idle sand beneath the feet of you who know the old wisdom, and are young with unperishing years, and are a great king in some land I know not of—so, at the least, men say. But I know one thing that you do not know."

"If you will tell me one thing that I do not know, O Connla, you shall have your heart's desire."

Connla laughed at that.

"Not even you, O Ulad, can give me my heart's desire."

"And what will that desire be, then, you whom the islesmen call Connla the Wise?"

"That one might see in the dew the footsteps of old years returning."

"That thing, Connla, I cannot do."

"And yet you would do what is a thing as vain as that?"

"Speak. I will listen."

Then Connla drew close to Ulad, and whispered in his ear. Thereafter he gave him a hollow reed with holes in it, such as the shep-

Ulad of the Dreams

herding folk use on the hills. And with that he went away into the darkness.

When the moon rose, Ulad took the reed and played upon it. While he played, scales fell from his eyes, and dreams passed from his brain, and his heart grew light. Then he sang—

“Come forth, Fand, come forth, beautiful Fand, my
woman, my fawn,
The smell of thy falling hair is sweet as the breath
of the wild-brier—
I weary of this white moonshine who love better
the white sheen of thy breasts,
And the secret song of the gods is faint beside the
craving in my blood.

Fand, Fand, Fand, white one, who art no dream
but a woman,
Come forth from the grianân, or lo, by the word of
me, Ulad the King,
Forth shalt thou come as a she-wolf, and no more
be a woman,
Come forth to me, Fand, who am now as a flame
for thy burning!”

Thereupon a low laugh was heard, and Fand came out of the grianân. White and beautiful she was, the fairest of all women, and Ulad was glad. When near, she whispered in his ears, and hand in hand they went back into the grianân.

Ulad of the Dreams

At dawn Ulad looked upon the beauty of Fand. He saw she was as a flower.

“O fair and beautiful dream,” he whispered; but of a sudden Fand laughed in her sleep, and he remembered what Connla the Wise had told him.

“Woman,” Ulad muttered then, “I see well that you are not my dream, but only a woman.” And with that he half rose from her.

Fand opened her eyes, and the beauty of them was greater for the new light that was there.

“Then you are only Ulad, a man?” she cried, and she put her arms about him, and kissed him on the lips and on the breast, sobbing low as with a strange gladness. “I will follow you, Ulad, to death, for I am the woman of your love.”

“Ay,” he said, looking beyond her, “if I feed you, and call you my woman, and find pleasure in you, and give you my manhood.”

“And what else would you, O Ulad?” Fand asked, wondering.

“I am Ulad the Lonely,” he answered; this, and no more.

Then, later, he took the hollow reed again, and again played. And when he had played

Ulad of the Dreams

he looked at Fand. He saw into her heart and into her brain.

"I have dreamed my dream," he said; "but I am still Ulad the Wonder-Smith."

With that he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand, and said this thing:

"O woman who would not come to me, when I called out of that within me which is I myself, farewell!"

And with that Fand was a drift of white flowers there upon the deerskins.

Then once more Ulad spoke—

"O woman, who heeded no bitter prayer of my heart, but at the last came only as a she-wolf to the wolf, farewell!"

And with that a wind-eddy scattered the white flowers upon the deerskins, so that they wavered hither and thither, and some were stained by the pale wandering fires of a rainbow that drifted over that place, then as now the haunt of these cloudy splendours, for ever woven there out of sun and mist.

At noon, the seafarers came toward the grianân with songs and offerings.

But Ulad was not there.

For three years after Ulad wooed Fand in the grianân in the Haven of the Foray, none who knew him of old beheld his shining eyes.

Ulad of the Dreams

Some said he had gone to Tir-na'n-Og; some that he had sailed for the Islands of Desire. His galley had been seen in the north, so rumour ran; its prow set for those isles where the fabled Fomorians lived, those Hebrid isles given over to wild seas, wild winds, and wild men. Others had recognised the white sail with the yellow star off the coast of Eri, in the sun-track that lies under the rainbow in the west over Hy Bràsil. Meanwhile the poets sang of the Lonely King, of Fand whom he had won and lost, and of the Melancholy of Ulad. Of these songs, the sweetest and most marvellous were those of Bêl the Harper—he whose songs and playing made women's hearts melt like wax, and in men wrought either intolerable longing or put sudden swift flames into the blood.

Bêl the Harper sang of Fand. Fair she was and wonderful; but when Ulad had looked into her mind, he had seen there only the shadow of his own passion, and the phantom of his own love, and the image of his loneliness.

All men knew the tale, for Bêl sang it by forest-fires and in the raths where the women, too, listened with shining eyes.

Was she a woman as other women are? they wondered; she whom Ulad had wrought in Hy Bràsil out of a garth of white blooms

Ulad of the Dreams

gathered under the hither base of a rainbow—gathered, and warmed all night against his breast, and at dawn become a woman there by his side.

Meanwhile dark days were upon all the regions of the Gael, in Eri, and in Alba. Wars went to and fro. The sword was like a travelling bird.

Great kings perished: some in battle, some taken unawares, some ignobly. The ollavs and the bards were awestricken. A sound of lamentation prevailed throughout distracted lands. In the dim recesses of the ancient woods the deathless alien folk congregated in the obscurities of twilight, in the blackness of night. Old forgotten gods came and sat by desolate pools, staring into prophetic waters. The tall deathly women who take their hearts in their hands and play the fatal music of impossible desires, moved in the black pine-forests. Among the oaks, inhuman shapes sat and brooded. Strange portents were upon the mountains in the west, in the north, and in the east: out of the south came wild rains, thunders, shakings, and tremblings of the earth.

At the end of the third year there was no great king left.

Brooding chieftains eyed each other jealously, but there was no commune of swords.

Ulad of the Dreams

The rich and the poor, the lordly and the ignoble, dwelled in fear of their fellow-men, and in worse fear of the demons, the congregating gods out of forgotten places, the laughter of a dreadful folk, winged and crested, heard often in the moonshine, and followed always by a sound as of stabbings and a wild screaming. Who were they who laughed in the moonshine, and stabbed for joy, and fed upon the screaming terror of strayed men? None knew; no more than any knew who lit the sudden fires upon treeless hills, or of what the echoes were that made a dreadful mocking among the hollows in the mountains. One king only survived; but he did not reign. Colla was old and weary. He lived alone, in a raised house of wicker-boughs, at the forest-end of the great lake of Bandore, at whose head was the rath of the King of the North—a rath dishevelled and unfrequented now, save by a feeble, eager folk, for there was no King of the North, nor any feudal kings, save only Colla that was too weary with age and sorrow.

One night Colla sat by the pine-logs, staring through the flame into the past. He heard no sound, but suddenly knew that some one stood by him.

When he looked, startled, he saw a tall

Ulad of the Dreams

woman, taller than any woman he had ever seen, and of a beauty dreadful and wonderful. She was clad in a green robe that hung about her like innumerable little leaves; her eyes were dark and shadowy as forest-pools; but whenever they moved, they had a flame in them as of a windblown torch.

"Peace be with you," said Colla.

The demon laughed.

"It is not for peace I come, O Colla," said the woman; "but to play to you upon my heart, that you may have wisdom."

With that she took her heart out of her breast, and blew the red out of it into a bloody foam, and then played upon the seven strings that were laid bare.

When she had played a brief while she stopped. Her eyes were upon Colla as two wind-spent fires. He rose.

"I know now what to do, O Woman out of the Woods," he said. "But where shall I find Bêl the Harper, and where shall I find Ulad the Dreamer, and where shall I find Aithnê his Dream?"

"You shall hear the harping of Bêl when you speak to the people three days hence at the Rath of Bandorê. And there shall be an echo, after Bêl's playing, which shall tell him where he may find Ulad. But of Aithnê I can

Ulad of the Dreams

tell you nothing, save that she dwells under the rainbow in the west."

With that the woman turned and went back into the night.

Till dawn Colla sat and dreamed of life and death. He passed into that shadowy realm where memories move with august and mournful eyes. Lordship of men and women, forlorn vicissitudes, dropping decays: thus moved the circuit of his thoughts. He had seen the wheels of fortune—chariot-wheels of a dreadful and unseeing God.

When the morrow came he left his retreat among the reeds of Bandore and went to the rath. There he bade the war-horns be blown, and all the people summoned from far and near: every prince and every warrior and every man who bore a sword or carried spear and bow. All were to assemble there to hear what he had to say, to hear the last words of the last of the kings.

It was a mighty concourse that assembled at noon on that third day. Many sons of kings were there, and great lords. All were weary of an unruled realm; the hearts of all were heavy because of the portents, and of the return of the old banished gods, and of the lighting of mysterious fires, and of the congregation of demons, and nocturnal laugh-

Ulad of the Dreams

ter, cries, and prophesyings. So that when Colla said what he had to say, all listened with eagerness. At the close a great shout went up. Even those who held aloof from the revelation of a demon were glad that a great king should be found to rule over all the northlands of the Gael; and if Ulad lived, there was none better than he, for all that no man there knew more of him than that he bore a great name, and was accounted one of the lords of the world, though where his own kingdom was, and what his people, none knew.

“But where is he? Where is Ulad the Lonely? Where is Ulad our King?” the whole assemblage cried as with one voice, when Colla sat back on the golden chair of Bandore.

It was then that a wild, sweet harping was heard.

All turned and looked toward the reedy end of the Lake of Bandore, whence the rumour of the music. Along the path from the west a man walked, harping as he came.

It was Bêl the Harper.

He stopped when he came to the white cliff to the west side of the rath. He stared a long while, for he had seen no such concourse of the people, nor any such assemblage of mighty

Ulad of the Dreams

ones, since the day when the Seven Kings of the North lost all, in the great battle beyond the mountains of Doon.

Colla rose, and called to Bêl.

“Hail, O King. I hear. Glory to our lost land!”

“Play to us, O Bêl.”

Then Bêl played upon his harp, and he sang. The hearts of all were like running water when he played, and like melted wax before his singing was done.

In the silence that followed his singing, and the marvellous sweet harping whereof the secret was his own, there was heard a strange thing. The music of the stricken strings moved upward like a homing dove seeking her way; or like blue wood-smoke when there is no wind. It moved against the face of the white cliff, clinging wanderingly there with pale, aërial wings of sound, or breaths of invisible song.

A sweet, wild air, incommunicable, delicate as falling dew, stole from the cliff, the fragrance of the spiral music netted among the unseen facets wrought of wind and sun. None knew what it forebode, nor could any there liken the sweet, fantastic rhythm to any rare sounds made by mortal man.

All saw that Bêl the Harper stood as though

Ulad of the Dreams

entranced: for his own harping was the most wonderful since Cravethen played death into the love of Cormac Conlingas, and the beautiful Eilidh whom he loved so passing well.

“Speak, Bêl!” cried Colla: “speak! For all may see that you hear what we cannot hear, in that echo upon the cliff of Bandore.”

Slowly the Harper looked round: slowly he advanced. He spoke no word till he was near the golden chair of the king. “O king . . . and it is you, Colla of the House of Amergin the Great King, whom I thought dead, as are all other kings in this weary land now, save one. . . . O king, that is no echo that seems an echo up there on the cliff. I know that strange, sweet singing.”

“If it be not an echo, what then is that singing and confused murmur as of reeds in the wind? And where, O Bêl, have you heard that strange, sweet singing?”

“I have heard that singing, ay, and that confused murmur as of reeds in the wind, long, long ago, when I was a boy. It was when I had sailed three days and three nights, without food or water, driven seaward on the crest of an endless, wind-harried wave. I did not know then that the land I came to, and lingered in for what may have been a day or a year, or a day of many years, was Hy Bràsil.”

Ulad of the Dreams

At this a low whisper went from mouth to mouth among all who listened. At last Colla spoke:

“Then, Bêl, that sweet music that has now ceased is like unto that which long years ago was sweet against your ears, in the Land of Youth, over-sea?”

“Even so, O king. There is none like it. No man playeth it, no man knoweth it. Only the heroes in Flatheanas hear it: it is like dew upon the grass in Tir-na'n-Og, if that indeed be other than Hy Bràsil itself. Only those may hear it who put their left ear against the wind at the rising of the moon. The green people know it, and the silent ones whom we see no more, and those who dwell in shadow, and the unremembered gods, and the demons.”

“And there is none that plays it, none that knows it?”

“I have known none save two others than myself. As for me, I play but an echo of it. But I know it.”

“And the two others?”

“One was Cravethen the Harper, whose soul is with the demons because of the fiery death he wrought upon Cormac Conlingas, and upon the beauty of Eilidh. His soul now is a torn harp whereon demons play when they see beauty debased or destroyed.

Ulad of the Dreams

That is the sin of sins, O king: to destroy beauty."

"And the other?"

"The other is Ulad the Dreamer, him whom I have sung of so often, Ulad the Lonely. And by the same token, it is of Ulad and no other that the swarm of music on the cliff was."

"Tell us the hidden word. Speak without fear. As for me, I reign here only until the Ardrigh, the High King, shall come."

"The singing was like this: though my words, O Colla, are as bats after the brown birds that sing in the night. . . .

"In the wild westlands
Of Alba the foam-swept,
Awaiteth your High King,
Predestined, and worthy.
Ulad his name is,
Ulad the Lonely:
And great is the fame of him,
A King from his birthtide,
A King among warriors.
Call him to rule ye,
O people of Eri,
Lest evils unnumbered
Pursue ye still further,
Till camp-fires and duns
And green raths in green places
Are few in all Eri
As heroes and kings are!"

Ulad of the Dreams

When Bêl the Harper ceased, all there gave a great shout.

Swords leapt into the air.

“Ulad! Ulad!” all cried. “Go hence, O Bêl, and bring back Ulad the King to reign over us.”

Thereupon Colla stepped forward.

“Hearken, O Bêl, and all ye warriors and folk. I, Colla the King, hold peace here until that day when Ulad the King shall return with Bêl the Harper to be Ardrigh of all the northlands of the Gael, from the two seas and the waist of Eri, to the coasts of Alba and the Isles of the North.”

And so it was.

II

THE GLORY OF THE KING

For the three years which followed the coming of Ulad to Bandore, there was peace in all the lands of the north.

The tributary kings laid aside their swords: the spear and the arrow, save in the fray of the hunt, quenched no longer their red thirst. Everywhere blue smoke ascended, from the great straths, from the shore-combes, from inland valleys, from the woodlands. The green corn grew to a yellow harvest: the aftermath was filled with peace, and without rumour of battles and dissensions. Winter, spring, summer; the white to the brown, the brown to the yellow, the yellow to the green, the green to the russet: each season came and went, orderly, glad, welcome.

In the forest townships and the great raths on the plain the people grew slowly to the likeness of Ulad. The ollavs preached a life of peace and fair deeds; the poets sang of the great past, and of heroes, and of beautiful

Ulad of the Dreams

women, and of the passion of life, and in the songs of one and all was the beauty of dream.

Long, long afterward, this time was sung of as the golden age.

With longing eyes many a dreamer has turned upon it his backward gaze, fain of a day when men and women loved and had joy, in great peace, and to the charmed music of dream.

Yet even in that day the loneliness of Ulad became a proverb.

All men rejoiced save Ulad the King.

He dwelt solitary, the strange poet. In vain men praised him for great deeds: in vain the bards sang of his own sweet harping, exceeding that of Bêl himself; in vain women offered him white arms, the beating heart, soft eyes of flame.

Of his great deeds he held small account, and was weary of the idle rumour of such things; because all his heart yearned for the one great love he dreamed of. And little solace for him was any singing of bards or soft playing of harps and reed-flutes, who had by day and by night a lovelier, a more haunting music in the lonely glens and desolate shadowy straths of his mind. Tall women, gracious, sweet, beautiful, with these he might have had joy; but ever since he had slain

Ulad of the Dreams

Fand with his will, he could seek no love of any woman. There was but one woman in the world for him; and of her he knew only silence and memory.

Bêl the Harper alone knew the story of the love of Ulad.

And this is that tale.

In the spring of the year that followed the passing of Fand, Ulad the Lonely reached a great fjord in the remote north of Alba. There he met Aithnê, the woman of whom he had dreamed. She was the daughter of a lord of the north isles, Cormac of the Rocks, so called because he had his dún on the summit of the midmost of three great heights at the south end of a green and lovely island.

Aithnê Ulad loved from the hour when he first saw her. She was tall, and fleet as a roe; her dusky hair waved over a face of so great a beauty that Ulad's heart ached because of it. Dark, curving eyebrows made a lovely twilight above her eyes, which were of a lustrous grey-green hazel, like the sunlit green hollow of a wave over sand, though often they darkened with a soft, dewy dusk, wonderful to see. Her flowerlike face was as that of Deirdrê or Grainne or Blánid, only more full of dream and ecstasy even than hers whose eyes lit the death of Naois, more fair and ex-

Ulad of the Dreams

ceeding sweet than that of her for whom Diarmid gave up all, more sad with extreme of joy than that of her before whom a man's life passed in flame. Yes, Ulad thought, she had the surpassing beauty of that Eilidh, queen of women, with whom Isla the Singer swam forth, at the dawn following a disastrous day, swam forth, seaward, against the sunrise. And she was fair and wild and dreamlike as was Fand, whom he had wrought out of white and red flowers gathered at the base of a rainbow in Hy Bràsil.

And Aithnê? She loved Ulad. All of her life went out to him. He was her lord, her prince, her singer of songs, her dreamer of dreams, her hero, her king.

The hour came when at last he spoke. It was at dusk, by a glade, overagainst the running wave. Words swam into hearing, and drowned in passionate silence. Each came to each as two flames that become one.

Later he told her of Fand. Then he spoke of Eilidh, whom his kinsman Isla the Singer had loved and won, and made a deathless memory among men because of her queenlihood of beauty and the extreme mighty reach and wonder of their love.

“And lo,” he whispered at the last, “Fand was indeed but a dream—the idle foam on the

Ulad of the Dreams

running wave of my dream. But thou—thou, Aithnê, art my dream itself.”

She sighed, and pressed her heart against his. He heard her voice as one may hear drops trickling through the moss beside the surge and roar of a mountain-torrent.

“And thou, Ulad . . . thou art Ulad!”

In the beating heart of silence that followed they lived, in a shadow-fleeting moment, all life. Then, abruptly, the boughs of a low, spreading oak disparted. A man stepped forth. It was Olg, son of the brother of Cormac of the Rocks.

He cast his dark, frowning eyes upon Aithnê, but did not look at Ulad, though the words he spoke were for him.

“The yellow-haired men are upon us,” he said simply.

Ulad withdrew his clasped hand from that of Aithnê. Then, suddenly, he stooped his head, and put his lips upon the white flower he had held. Olg moved forward soundlessly.

With the point of his spear he drew blood from his arm and let it drop into the hollow of his right hand. This, still speaking no word, he spilled between Aithnê and Ulad. With a bloody finger he touched the breast of Ulad.

Ulad of the Dreams

Aithnê drew back, pale. But her eyes flamed.

Ulad stood for a moment, pondering. Then he stooped, and took Aithnê's hands in his, and kissed her on the lips.

"So be it, Olg, son of Olg," he said.

Thuswise Ulad and Aithnê parted, knowing that Olg had put a feud to the death between himself and Ulad, and had spilled blood to be a widening gulf for ever betwixt him and Aithnê. On the morrow the men would meet. Now it was night, and the yellow-haired men were come.

At the rising of the moon, swords and spears sang their fierce song. Deep thirst was theirs, and none went forth of that dreadful Battle of the Rising Moon unquenched.

A grey dawn, streaked with red, as though tattered banners, flaunted above invisible sky-eye armies met in war, brought an end to a strife which by moor and hillside and shore had endured till the stars swam pale and sank drowned in light.

The yellow-haired northmen were everywhere: but they were still now. On the heather, beside granite boulders, on the wave-splashed white rocks, their motionless bodies lay, no battle-song upon their lips, no fire in their blue eyes. The sunrise turned their

Ulad of the Dreams

locks into pale gold, and put a faint bloom against the whiteness of their faces. Neither thoughts nor desires were behind these silent brows, but only the iron of the spear-head or the adder tongue of the feathered arrow.

The tide of battle had already ebbed for Lochlin when, at the first greying of the dark, a fleet of thirty galleys had come from the north of the island and taken the Vikings by surprise. Their wave-riders were driven ashore, and only two escaped, and these only because of a slight mist that drifted here and there upon the sea.

An ebbing tide, for sure; but a tide that bore with it a mighty tribute to the valour of the men of Lochlin. Cormac of the Rocks, and his five sons, and most of his blood-kin with more than ten score of his clansmen, fell in that Battle of the Rising Moon. There was thrice a time when all would have been lost but for the might and voice of Ulad. It was on that field he won his name, the Brother of Death.

When all was over, Ulad sought Aithnè. Nowhere in or near the great dún of Cormac, nor in the rath by the inland loch, was there any trace of the daughter of the king. For three days and three nights men searched like hounds every cave, every glen, every corrie,

Ulad of the Dreams

passing from tree to tree in the woods, from boulder to boulder upon the hills : but vainly.

There were many island galleys lying deep in the green water besides those of the Vikings, but in none of these was the body of Olg found, nor was it traced elsewhere. For he, too, had disappeared. In all, among the slain and wounded and whole, among all who dwelt upon the island, there were nine missing—Aithnê and Olg and seven men of his own following.

It was feared that, caught in a disastrous ebb of battle, Olg had tried to escape, and sought to save Aithnê, but that one of the Viking galleys had run them down.

Only Ulad knew in his heart that Aithnê was alive. Could death come to her, and he not know it? Would not every leaping nerve cry out with the knowledge?

Week after week passed. Not a trace of the missing ones was found, not the faintest rumour came from any of the isles or the mainland.

For six months, and till the very heart of winter, Ulad spared not one single day to rest. To each and every of the isles he sailed, and along the wild coasts of Alba, from the Cape of Storms to where the foam whitens along the Moyle. Then when the first breath

Ulad of the Dreams

of spring blew soft across the snow on the hills and the drifting ice on the lochs, he set sail by the unknown sea-ways to the north isles of the Northmen, and afterwards to Lochlin itself.

At the end of a year from the Battle of the Rising Moon he knew nothing further of Aithnê. Nowhere had he found a trace of the fugitives: from no man in any land, neither from Gael nor Pict nor Northman, had he heard one word of the beautiful daughter of Cormac of the Rocks, nor yet of Olg the Swarthy. Nevertheless he knew that Aithnê lived.

That summer no one of his people or following saw Ulad, no, nor for two years thereafter. But in all lands he journeyed, harping and singing, though there was only one song on his lips, that which lay below all songs he sang, the song of his desire: and only one music in his heart, that of the beauty of Aithnê, of his deathless dream.

When the third spring came shining out of cloud-woven blue and along the wet green sprays of the larches, Ulad returned to Alba. His heart was weary, but still he failed not in his quest.

With the first heats of summer he grew faint and despairing. The beauty of the world

Ulad of the Dreams

whispered night and day of her whose beauty was to him his star, his joy, his strength, his dream, his life.

One gloaming, as he moved through the woods at the end of the great Loch of Fionn, abruptly he stood still, the blood leaping from his heart and striking swift, heavy blows against his brain. Before him on the shore was a man, crouching beside a fire, and singing to himself as he watched the deer-meat catch the flame. And the song that he sang was one Ulad himself had wrought, and sang to Aithnê, and made it hers because she and no other was worthy of the name Heart o' Beauty.

"O where are thy white hands, Heart o' Beauty?

Heart o' Beauty!

They are as white foam on the swept sands,

Heart o' Beauty!

They are as white swans over dusky lands,

They are wands, magic wands, thy white hands,

Heart o' Beauty!

From the white dawn till the grey dusk,

Heart o' Beauty!

I hear the unseen waves of unseen strands,

Heart o' Beauty!

I see the sun rise and set over shadowy lands,

But never, never, never thy white hands, thy white hands,

Heart o' Beauty!"

Ulad of the Dreams

Trembling, moved with a great fear, a greater hope, Ulad soundlessly drew near.

The man sprang to his feet, startled. He had heard a dry twig crackle. When he saw Ulad he let his spear droop to his side.

"I will do you no harm," said Ulad slowly, "but I will know one thing of you."

"That I see well," the man answered; "and as for the thing you desire to know, speak."

"It is this. When and where and from whom heard you that song?"

"I heard it from the lips of Derg son of Teig son of Derg of the Three Fords. It was at a place not far from here, near the grianân on the west shore of the sea-loch known as the Haven of the Foray. It is where, as Bêl the Harper sings, Ulad the Poet-King wooed the woman Fand that he wrought out of red and white flowers, and where she died as a pluckt flower dies."

"And what of Ulad?"

"He loved overmuch. And so he too died."

"Is he dead, in truth?"

"So men say. Nevertheless he died not by the grianân where Fand laughed at his pain, as some of the singers have it. For I have heard from Derg son of Teig, who gave me that song, that Ulad the Lonely came to his death among the far isles of the north after the

Ulad of the Dreams

Battle of the Rising Moon, wherein Cormac of the Rocks and most of his kinship were slain."

"And when was it that that Derg son of Teig gave this song to you?"

"On the night of the new moon: and the moon is now sickle-shaped again."

Ulad's heart beat, and he stared at the man strangely.

"Your name?" he said at last.

"Coran, who also am called Coran-Cù because of my fleetness."

'At that Ulad drew from his belt a blade, hilted with amber.

"Take this, Coran the Hound, and keep it in memory of me, who am Ulad the Lonely, for it is great news you have given me this day."

Coran made an obeisance, and looked with wondering eyes at the face of him whose name was in so many songs of love and battle.

"Tell me, Coran, of this Derg son of Teig."

"He was one of those who escaped after the Battle of the Rising Moon. Some say every islander died in that great fight, save only the few who fled with Olg son of Olg the Blind, brother of Cormac of the Rocks. All were drowned off an unknown shore, save

Ulad of the Dreams

only Derg and Olg and Aithnê, daughter of Cormac of the Rocks.”

Ulad leaned forward as a sleuth-hound leans when the smell on the track grows keen.

“And—and—Aithnê—Olg and Aithnê—are they—were they also at the Haven of the Foray?”

“No. Derg lay there, because of his wound. Aithnê came with him and seven other men from where she lived with Olg the Swarthy, a king of some land now, I know not where. She came there to die, because from the songs of the poets she knew that was where Ulad, whom she loved, blew into dead blossoms the flower that was Fand. Of a truth, she may have hoped to meet you again, O Ulad, for it is said you are not of those whose dust is in the earth.”

“And then?”

“Then Olg pursued her, and came to the Haven of the Foray, and called upon her to come back to him, being his wife. But she answered that though her body had been made bondager to him, she was free, and loved Ulad only, and that, too, whether he was in life or in death. Moreover, she swore by the sun and by the wind that if Olg sought her further, she would slay herself.

“‘Mayst thou not love two men, Aithnê?’

Ulad of the Dreams

Olg cried, for he was fain of her whom he had made his wife.

“ ‘Rather should I know death,’ she answered. ‘There is but one love, that which passeth all else, and that is as life itself. It is Ulad I love, and I am no man’s henceforth, nay, though Ulad my King were now but as wind-harried dust.’

“ ‘Ulad is dead, O Aithnê,’ Olg cried again, taking the death-oath by the moon.

“ But Aithnê would not hearken to his plea. She said these words: ‘If he be living still, I shall find my King. If he be dead, my King awaiteth me. There is but one love.’

“ It was then that Olg strove to land and take back Aithnê, whom he had made his wife. But Derg and those with him fought for the fair daughter of Cormac—Heart o’ Beauty, as you yourself have called her, O Ulad. And in that strife Olg was driven back, weak with open wounds, and stricken unto death. Aithnê, with the three men who had not been slain, save Derg, who was left as one dead, sailed westward.”

Here Coran stopped, as though he had no more to say. But Ulad bore hardly upon him, and he told all. He had come upon Derg, and had comforted his wound. And Derg had told him how on the morrow he had seen a galley

Ulad of the Dreams

drifting by, bottom upward, and thus knew that Aithnê and her company had seen death in the hollow of a wave. Thereafter he had waited with Derg a while, and it was from him he learned that song. Then a shadow had grown through Derg, and he died.

Ulad bowed his head. His hope was as a wounded bird that flutters on the ground.

Nevertheless he remembered what Aithnê had said, and was glad. But all he said was this: "Truly, O Coran, there is but one love. All else is but a shadow." Only to himself he whispered:

"If she be living still, I shall find my Queen. If she be dead, my Queen awaiteth me. There is but one love."

From that day, dreaming his dream, Ulad the Lonely forgot war and the seat of wisdom and the commune of the homestead and rath and dûn, and dwelled only with his thoughts and dreams by the grianân on the Haven of the Foray. And so until the day when Bêl the Harper came and led him forth to be High King of all the northlands of the Gael.

III

It was, indeed, a great and wonderful peace that was upon all northern Gaeldom during

Ulad of the Dreams

the three years when Ulad was High King. All things moved orderly and to fair and noble issues. But the King knew sorrow: deep sorrow brooded in his heart throughout every hour of every day, whether he hunted in the woods or on the hills, or trained the young men in the noble and chivalrous life of the sword and of peace, or sat in council, or listened to the bards or to the mysteries of those who were the servants of the gods, or moved or ate or rested, or himself played upon the harp, or wandered alone, or dwelled solitary in memories: and in sorrow each night he closed his eyes.

For there is but one love.

Of what avail the glory of the King unto the King himself? Had he not but one glory: Aithnê? Had he not but one desire: Aithnê? Had he not but one joy, one hope, one peace?

There came a day when a rumour reached him that far in the southland of Eri a most fair and wonderful queen lived with a great prince Artân, and that she was the daughter of a dead king of the isles. The man who brought the rumour said that she was called Aithnê.

Ulad pondered a while. Then he knew that Aithnê could not be that queen, for she would have come to him. There is but one love.

Ulad of the Dreams

Nevertheless, he sent Bêl the Harper into the southlands, and bade him bring word of this queen.

At the third rising of the moon after he left, Bêl's harp once more made music in Bandore. It was true that the wife of Artân was called Aithnê, and that she was fair and comely and gracious. But her beauty beside that of Aithnê whom Ulad loved was as the wan face of February beside the glory of June.

And so it went till the third year of Ulad's overlordship was gone. On the morrow of the fourth year, the elders among the men of rank, and the priests, and the bards, came to him with a prayer. And that prayer was that he would take unto himself a queen. Every fair woman that was unwed would gladly be wife to Ulad; and there were in that day seven women so beautiful beyond all others that they were sung of by the bards as the Seven Roses of Gaeldom.

Ulad listened to what they had to say. When they ceased, he spoke—

“There is no woman in all the lands of the Gael whose eyes can dim for me the beauty of the eyes of Aithnê, daughter of Cormac of the Rocks, and for whom year after year I have waited, famished. My dream stayeth me.”

Ulad of the Dreams

“Nevertheless, O Ulad,” they urged, “the Aithnê of your love is surely dead long since. Out of a thousand beautiful women, surely there is one you would have to wife. Pluck whomso you will of the Seven Roses of the Gael. Nay, if your heart is set upon it, lead us to war against this Artân, King in the Southland, and take unto yourself his queen Aithnê, who may yet prove to be her whom you have lost.”

“There is but one love,” answered Ulad, and turned wearily from those who spoke. Straightway thereafter he went into the forest behind the great dûn of Bandore, and dwelled there with his secret sorrow and his bitter unquenched desire till the dews lay cool upon his brows, and the stars filled the night with solemn signals of unrelinquished dreams. At the last, the dawn came, rose-red and grey. Then he returned to his own place, and to the weary glory of the King, and to his secret sorrow and his bitter inappeasable desire.

One eve the aged Colla came to him.

“Ulad,” he said after a long silence, “I too have known the dark crown of sorrow. I too have been a king. And I am old now with the exceeding heavy burden of the years. It is thus, mayhap, that I can see into your heart. I see dark lonely sorrow there. But this I

Ulad of the Dreams

see also, that you are a king, and will do wearily, but yet will do, what you have to do."

"Listen, Colla of the White Hair. When I was young I sojourned a while with the greatest prince among the princes of men. It was oversea, in the land of the Kymry. And when I bade him farewell, I asked him to put his hands upon me and wish me the one thing I should need. He wished me neither happiness, nor great fortune, nor fame, nor victory in war, nor love of women, nor great wisdom, nor song, nor the dream of the dreamer; but what he said unto me was this— 'O Dreamer of dreams, this wish shall I wish thee: Strength to endure until the end.' And so, Colla of the White Hair, I bethink me often of the saying of that prince among men."

At that, Colla went away comforted somewhat. Yet in his heart he knew that Ulad's hour was moving swift across some far-off hill or through deep forests.

He turned to speak to the King once more. But Ulad was staring against the west, his eyes filled with the glory of his dream.

From that day, nevertheless, a growing weakness came upon the High King. Yet was it no weakness of the body; for when Balba, the lord of Tyr-Connla, the tallest and strong-

Ulad of the Dreams

est of all the princes in Gaeldom, openly in anger struck his wife Malv, Ulad seized him by the waist and whirled him above his head and dashed him upon the ground. "Eat dust, thou dog who strikest a woman," he cried; but to deaf ears, for Balba had already fared to a shadowy land whence none could hear the thin falling echo of his perishing cry of wrath.

The Festival of Peace was nigh, and all men made ready to rejoice. On the lips of every bard throughout the realms of the north was the glory of the King. All dreamed of a mighty kingdom yet to be. But Ulad dreamed only of a kingdom beyond the Rainbow.

One yellow wane of day, in the fall of the leaf, Ulad sat in a great carved chair outside the dún. Not one of those who were about him spoke. All saw that the King dreamed his dream. Bêl the Harper had been playing upon the harp. In the dim land of sound all there had followed lovely desires. Ulad longed with ancient sorrow, with bitter unquenched thirst of the aching heart.

Bêl slowly struck the strings once more. Abruptly he ceased. All looked at him. The eyes of the bard were fixed upon one, clad in green, who came slowly out of the wood.

Ulad of the Dreams

When he drew near, he played low upon the small harp that he carried. None stirred, because of the sweetness of what he played. Only Bêl sighed, and Ulad's eyes darkened.

It was but the song of a bird in the moonshine: sweet as that, brief as that. But when the green harper had ceased playing, Bêl rose, and threw his own harp from him, and bowed his head. Then, raising it, he looked at Ulad.

"The Hour waits, O King," he said.

But Ulad made no answer. His shadow-haunted eyes wavered not in their intent gaze upon him who had come out of the forest, and was known of no man, and had a strange light upon his face that came from within, and whose faint smile brought to him dim memories of splashing waves and the salt weedy smell of island shores.

"The Hour is come, O King," said Bêl the Harper once more. But even while he spoke, the green harper played.

At that playing, all who heard passed into the shadowy land of dream. Some beheld joy, and dallied with it; some peace, and wooed it; some love, some honour, some fortune. Strong men sat brooding, heedless of the sword, idle to the hunter's horn, recking only to the song of deep delight, of deeper peace, of a dream within a dream. In the

Ulad of the Dreams

heart of women tears and longings subsided in a spray of mist, and out of that mist came white doves and lovely rainbow-hued phantoms of desire. There was silence upon every bush, upon every tree. Not a bird moved. Each little brown breast quivered. The wild deer in the forest stood, with one hoof lifted; the fawns trembled like aspens, for all their life had ebbed into their liquid wondering eyes. The fox blinked drowsily among the oak-roots. There was dream upon every living thing.

Bél the Harper died in that hour. He beheld again his youth, and he died. He only of all men save Ulad might know, might understand, the secret song that the green harper played. And in sooth he knew. The smile was on his lips still, when, unseen of all there, who saw but his body prone on the grass, he was moving swift through a flowery glade in Tir-na'n-Og, radiant again in the exceeding sweet beauty of youth, and calling, calling, calling a woman's name with a sobbing joy.

And Ulad . . . he, too, heard, understood. In that playing he saw the sweet phantom of the face of Aithnê, heard the far echo of her calling voice.

None saw him go. That which was in the golden chair did not stir; nevertheless, Ulad rose and passed before all there. The green

Ulad of the Dreams

harper smiled, and moved before him into the forest. They fared onward, and left the forest glooms and went over the shoulder of the smooth green hill facing the west.

Beyond, the whole land and distant sea lay in a haze of golden vapour. A rainbow builded itself gloriously aflame against the vast precipitous cloud-cliffs behind.

Under the rainbow Ulad walked, with glad eager eyes.

“Behold thy kingdom, Ulad,” said a voice beside him, a voice so passing sweet that his spirit moved unto the depth of life. He looked, thinking to behold the shining eyes of the harper. It was the face of Aithnê, the voice of Aithnê, the hand of Aithnê.

“Aithnê!” he cried.

She put her arms about him, and kissed him on the lips.

“If he be living still, I shall find my King,” she whispered. “There is but one love.”

It was then that Colla the White, leaning above the cold face of Ulad where he sat white and still in the great chair of the Ardrigh, and looking into the deep quiet of the now untroubled eyes, raised his withered shaking hands, and in a great voice called through the death-foam on his lips, “Behold! the Glory of the King!”

EPILOGUE

*"Thus begins another vigil, that of the singers in God's
acre."*

The Shadow of Arvor.

"The will of God is in the wind."

Santez Anna.

"The Wind and Silence, God's eldest born."

("The Book of the Opal.")

Epilogue

THE WIND, THE SHADOW, AND THE SOUL

There are dreams beyond the thrust of the spear, and there are dreams and dreams; of what has been or what is to be, as well as the more idle fantasies of sleep. And this, perhaps, is of those dreams whose gossamer is spun out of the invisible threads of sorrow; or it may be, is woven out of the tragic shadows of unfulfilled vicissitude. It is of little moment.

One who was, now is not. That "is the sting, the wonder."

One who was, now is not. The soul and the shadow have both gone away upon the wind.

I write this in a quiet sea-haven. Tall cliffs half enclose it, in two white curves, like the wings of the solander when she hollows them as she breasts the north wind.

These sun-bathed cliffs, with soft hair of green grass, against whose white walls last

Epilogue

year the swallows, dusky arrowy shuttles, slid incessantly, and where tufts of sea-lavender hung like breaths of stilled smoke, now seem to me merely tall cliffs. Then, when we were together, they were precipices which fell into seas of dream, and at their bases was for ever the rumour of a most ancient, strange, and penetrating music. It is I only, now, who do not hear: doubtless, in those ears, it fashions new meanings, mysteries, and beauty: there, where the music deepens beyond the chime of the hours, and Time itself is less than the whisper of the running wave. White walls, which could open, and where the sea-song became a spirit, still with the foam-bells on her hair, but with a robe green as grass, and in her hand a white flower.

Symbols: yes. To some, foolish; to others clear as the noon, the clearness that is absolute in light, that is so obvious, and is unfathomable.

Last night the wind suddenly smote the sea. There had been no warning. The sun had set beneath narrow peninsulas of lemon and pale mauve; overagainst the upper roseate glow, the east was a shadowy opal wilderness, with one broad strait of luminous green wherein a star trembled. At the furtive suffusion of the twilight from behind the leaves, a bat, heedless

Epilogue

of the season, flittered through the silent reaches; and when it too was lost in the obscurity, and darkness was silence and silence darkness, the continuous wave upon the shore was but the murmurous voice of that monotony. Three hours later a strange confused sound was audible. At midnight there was a sudden congregation of voices; a myriad scream tore the silence; the whole sea was uplifted, and it was as though the whirling body of the tide was rent therefrom and flung upon the land.

I did not sleep, but listened to the wind and sea. My dreams and thoughts, children of the wind, were but ministers of a mind wrought in shadow. They did "the will of beauty and regret."

At dawn the tempest was over. But for an hour thereafter the sea was in a shroud of scud and spray: I could see nothing but this shimmering, dreadful whiteness.

Why do I write this? It is because in this past night of tempest, in this day of calm, I have come close to one of whom I speak, and would image in this after-breath, as a sudden fragrance of violets in an unexpected place, a last fragrance of memory. Yet, I would not have written these last words to this book if it were not for the keen resurrec-

Epilogue

tion of my sorrow in the very haven of to-day's noontide.

I was in a hollow in the eastern cliff, a hollow filled with pale blue shadow, and with a faint sea-rumour clinging invisibly to the flint bosses and facets of the sun-warmed chalk. Before me rose gradually a grass-green path, aslant upon the upward slope. There was absolute stillness in the air. The trouble of the waters made this landward silence as peace within peace.

Out of the blue serenities, where nothing, not even the moving whiteness of a vanishing wing, was visible; out of the heat and glory of the day; out of that which is beyond—an eddy of wind swiftly descended. I saw the grasses shiver along the green path. A few broken sprays and twigs whirled this way and that. In my own land this has one open meaning. Those invisible ones whom we call the hidden people—whom so many instinctively ever reducing what is great to what is small, what is of mystery and tragic wonder to what is fantastic and unthinkable, call "the fairies"—have passed by.

There are too many who inhabit the world that from our eyes is hidden, for us to know who pass, in times, on occasions like this. The children of light and darkness tread the

Epilogue

same way. But to-day it was not one of those unseen and therefore unfamiliar kindred.

For when I looked again, I saw that the one whom I had lost moved slowly up the path; but not alone. Behind, or close by, moved another. It was this other who turned to me. The image stooped, and lifted a palmful of dust in the hollow of its hand. This it blew away with a little sudden breath; and I saw that it was not the shadow, nor the phantom, but the soul of that which I had loved. Yet my grief was for that sweet perished mortality when I saw the eddy-spiralled greying dust was all that remained.

But for a second I had seen them together, so much one, so incommunicably alien. In that moment of farewell, all that was of mortal beauty passed into the starry eyes of the comrade who had forgotten the little infinite change. It was then, it was thus, I saw Eternity. That is why I write.

Then, as a film of blue smoke fades into the sky, what I had seen was not; and the old bewilderment was mine again, and I knew not which was the shadow or which the soul, or whether it was but the wind which had thus ceased to be.

UNDER THE DARK STAR

NOTE TO THE DAN-NAN-RÒN

This story is founded upon a superstition familiar throughout the Hebrides. The legend exists also on the western coasts of Ireland; for Mr. Yeats has told me that one summer he met an old Connaught fisherman who claimed to be of the Sliochd-nan-Ròn, an ancestry, indeed, indicated in the man's name: Rooney.

As to my use of the forename "Gloom," in "Under the Dark Star" series of stories, I should explain that the designation is not a baptismal name. At the same time, I have actual warrant for its use; for I knew a Uist man who in the bitterness of his sorrow, after his wife's death in childbirth, named his son Meelad (i.e. the gloom of sorrow: grief).

THE ANOINTED MAN

Of the seven Achannas—sons of Robert Achanna of Achanna in Galloway, self-exiled in the far north because of a bitter feud with his kindred—who lived upon Eilanmore in the Summer Isles, there was not one who was not, in more or less degree, or at some time or other, fëy.

Doubtless I shall have occasion to allude to one and all again, and certainly to the eldest and youngest; for they were the strangest folk I have known or met anywhere in the Celtic lands, from the sea-pastures of the Solway to the kelp-strewn beaches of the Lews. Upon James, the seventh son, the doom of his people fell last and most heavily. Some day I may tell the full story of his strange life and tragic undoing, and of his piteous end. As it happened, I knew best the eldest and youngest of the brothers, Alasdair and James. Of the others, Robert, Allan, William, Marcus, and Gloom, none save the last-named survives, if peradventure *he* does, or has been seen of man for many years past. Of Gloom (strange

The Anointed Man

and unaccountable name, which used to terrify me, the more so as by the savagery of fate it was the name of all names suitable for Robert Achanna's sixth son) I know nothing beyond the fact that ten years or more ago he was a Jesuit priest in Rome, a bird of passage, whence come and whither bound no inquiries of mine could discover. Two years ago a relative told me that Gloom was dead, that he had been slain by some Mexican noble in an old city of Hispaniola beyond the seas. Doubtless the news was founded on truth, though I have ever a vague unrest when I think of Gloom, as though he were travelling hitherward—as though his feet, on some urgent errand, were already white with the dust of the road that leads to my house.

But now I wish to speak only of Alasdair Achanna. He was a friend whom I loved, though he was a man of close on forty and I a girl less than half his years. We had much in common, and I never knew any one more companionable, for all that he was called "Silent Ally." He was tall, gaunt, loosely-built. His eyes were of that misty blue which smoke takes when it rises in the woods. I used to think them like the tarns that lay amid the canna and gale-surrounded swamps in Uist, where I was wont to dream as a child.

The Anointed Man

I had often noticed the light on his face when he smiled, a light of such serene joy as young mothers have sometimes over the cradles of their firstborn. But, for some reason, I had never wondered about it, not even when I heard and understood the half-contemptuous, half-reverent mockery with which not only Alasdair's brothers but even his father at times used towards him. Once, I remember, I was puzzled when, on a bleak day in a stormy August, I overheard Gloom say, angrily and scoffingly, "There goes the Anointed Man!" I looked; but all I could see was, that, despite the dreary cold, despite the ruined harvest, despite the rotting potato-crop, Alasdair walked slowly onward, smiling, and with glad eyes brooding upon the grey lands around and beyond him.

It was nearly a year thereafter—I remember the date, because it was that of my last visit to Eilanmore—that I understood more fully. I was walking westward with Alasdair, towards sundown. The light was upon his face as though it came from within; and when I looked again, half in awe, I saw that there was no glamour out of the west, for the evening was dull and threatening rain. He was in sorrow. Three months before, his brothers, Allan and William, had been

The Anointed Man

drowned; a month later, his brother Robert had sickened, and now sat in the ingle from morning till the covering of the peats, a skeleton almost, shivering, and morosely silent, with large staring eyes. On the large bed, in the room above the kitchen, old Robert Achanna lay, stricken with paralysis. It would have been unendurable for me, but for Alasdair and James, and, above all, for my loved girl-friend, Anne Gillespie, Achanna's niece and the sunshine of his gloomy household.

As I walked with Alasdair I was conscious of a well-nigh intolerable depression. The house we had left was so mournful, the bleak, sodden pastures were so mournful; so mournful was the stony place we were crossing, silent but for the thin crying of the curlews; and above all so mournful was the sound of the ocean as, unseen, it moved sobbingly round the isle—so beyond words distressing was all this to me that I stopped abruptly, meaning to go no farther, but to return to the house, where, at least, there was warmth, and where Anne would sing for me as she spun.

But when I looked up into my companion's face I saw in truth the light that shone from within. His eyes were upon a forbidding stretch of ground, where the blighted potatoes

The Anointed Man

rotted among a wilderness of round skull-white stones. I remember them still, these strange far-blue eyes; lamps of quiet joy, lamps of peace, they seemed to me.

“Are you looking at Achnacarn?” (as the tract was called), I asked, in what I am sure was a whisper.

“Yes,” replied Alasdair, slowly; “I am looking. It is beautiful. beautiful; O God, how beautiful is this lovely world!”

I know not what made me act so, but I threw myself on a heathery ridge close by, and broke out into convulsive sobbings.

Alasdair stooped, lifted me in his strong arms, and soothed me with soft caressing touches and quieting words.

“Tell me, my fawn, what is it? What is the trouble?” he asked again and again.

“It is *you*—it is *you*, Alasdair,” I managed to say coherently at last; “it terrifies me to hear you speak as you did a little ago. You must be fëy. Why, why, do you call that hateful, hideous field beautiful—on this dreary day—and—and after all that has happened—oh, Alasdair?”

At this, I remember, he took his plaid and put it upon the wet heather, and then drew me thither, and seated himself and me beside him,

“Is it not beautiful, my fawn?” he asked,

The Anointed Man

with tears in his eyes. Then, without waiting for my answer, he said quietly, "Listen, dear, and I will tell you."

He was strangely still, breathless he seemed to me, for a minute or more. Then he spoke:

"I was little more than a child, a boy just in my teens, when something happened, something that came down the Rainbow-Arches of Cathair-Sith." He paused here, perhaps to see if I followed, which I did, familiar as I was with all fairy-lore. "I was out upon the heather, in the time when the honey oozes in the bells and cups. I had always loved the island and the sea. Perhaps I was foolish, but I was so glad with my joy that golden day that I threw myself on the ground and kissed the hot, sweet-ling, and put my hands and arms into it, sobbing the while with my vague, strange yearning. At last I lay still, nerveless, with my eyes closed. Suddenly I was aware that two tiny hands had come up through the spires of the heather, and were pressing something soft and fragrant upon my eyelids. When I opened them, I could see nothing unfamiliar. No one was visible. But I heard a whisper: 'Arise and go away from this place at once; and this night do not venture out, lest evil befall you.' So I rose, trem-

The Anointed Man

bling, and went home. Thereafter I was the same, and yet not the same. Never could I see, as they saw, what my father and brothers or the islefolk looked upon as ugly or dreary. My father was wroth with me many times, and called me a fool. Whenever my eyes fell upon those waste and desolated spots, they seemed to me passing fair, radiant with lovely light. At last my father grew so bitter that, mocking me the while, he bade me go to the towns, and see there the squalor and sordid hideousness wherein men dwelled. But thus it was with me: in the places they call slums, and among the smoke of factories, and the grime of destitution, I could see all that other men saw, only as vanishing shadows. What I saw was lovely, beautiful with strange glory, and the faces of men and women were sweet and pure, and their souls were white. So, weary and bewildered with my unwilling quest, I came back to Eilanmore. And on the day of my home-coming, Morag was there—Morag of the Falls. She turned to my father, and called him blind and foolish. ‘He has the white light upon his brows,’ she said of me; ‘I can see it, like the flicker-light in a wave when the wind’s from the south in thunder-weather. He has been touched with the Fairy Ointment. The Guid Folk know him.

The Anointed Man

It will be thus with him till the day of his death, if a *duinshee* can die, being already a man dead yet born anew. He upon whom the Fairy Ointment has been laid must see all that is ugly and hideous and dreary and bitter through a glamour of beauty. Thus it hath been since the Mhic-Alpine ruled from sea to sea, and thus is it with the man Alasdair your son.'

"That is all, my fawn, and that is why my brothers, when they are angry, sometimes call me the Anointed Man."

"That is all." Yes perhaps. But oh, Alasdair Achanna, how often have I thought of that most precious treasure you found in the heather, when the bells were sweet with honey-ooze! Did the wild bees know of it? Would that I could hear the soft hum of their gauzy wings!

Who of us would not barter the best of all our possessions—and some there are who would surrender all—to have one touch laid upon the eyelids, one touch of the Fairy Ointment? But the place is far, and the hour is hidden. No man may seek that for which there can be no quest.

Only the wild bees know of it, but I think they must be the bees of Magh-Mell. And there no man that liveth may wayfare—yet.

THE DÀN-NAN-RÒN

When Anne Gillespie, that was my friend in Eilanmore, left the island after the death of her uncle, the old man Robert Achanna, it was to go far west.

Among the men of the Outer Isles who for three summers past had been at the fishing off Eilanmore there was one named Mànus MacCodrum. He was a fine lad to see, but though most of the fisher-folk of the Lews and North Uist are fair, either with reddish hair and grey eyes, or blue-eyed and yellow-haired, he was of a brown skin with dark hair and dusky brown eyes. He was, however, as unlike to the dark Celts of Arran and the Inner Hebrides as to the northmen. He came of his people, sure enough. All the MacCodrums of North Uist had been brown-skinned and brown-haired and brown-eyed: and herein may have lain the reason why, in by-gone days, this small clan of Uist was known throughout the Western Isles as the *Sliochd nan Ròn*, the offspring of the Seals.

Not so tall as most of the men of North

Uist and the Lews, Mànus MacCodrum was of a fair height, and supple and strong. No man was a better fisherman than he, and he was well liked of his fellows, for all the morose gloom that was upon him at times. He had a voice as sweet as a woman's when he sang, and he sang often, and knew all the old runes of the islands, from the Obb of Harris to the Head of Mingulay. Often, too, he chanted the beautiful *orain spioradail* of the Catholic priests and Christian Brothers of South Uist and Barra, though where he lived in North Uist he was the sole man who adhered to the ancient faith.

It may have been because Anne was a Catholic too, though, sure, the Achannas were so also, notwithstanding that their forebears and kindred in Galloway were Protestant (and this because of old Robert Achanna's love for his wife, who was of the old Faith, so it is said)—it may have been for this reason, though I think her lover's admiring eyes and soft speech and sweet singing had more to do with it, that she pledged her troth to Mànus. It was a south wind for him as the saying is; for with her rippling brown hair and soft, grey eyes and cream-white skin, there was no comelier lass in the isles.

So when Achanna was laid to his long rest,

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

and there was none left upon Eilanmore save only his three youngest sons, Mànus Mac-Codrum sailed north-eastward across the Minch to take home his bride. Of the four eldest sons, Alasdair had left Eilanmore some months before his father died, and sailed westward, though no one knew whither or for what end or for how long, and no word had been brought from him, nor was he ever seen again in the island which had come to be called Eilan-nan-Allmharachain, the Isle of the Strangers; Allan and William had been drowned in a wild gale in the Minch; and Robert had died of the white fever, that deadly wasting disease which is the scourge of the isles. Marcus was now "Eilanmore," and lived there with Gloom and Seumas, all three unmarried, though it was rumoured among the neighbouring islanders that each loved Marsail nic Ailpean,¹ in Eilean-Rona of the Summer Isles hard by the coast of Sutherland.

When Mànus asked Anne to go with him she agreed. The three brothers were ill-pleased at this, for apart from their not wish-

¹ Marsail nic Ailpean is the Gaelic of which an English translation would be Marjory MacAlpine. *Nic* is a contraction for *nighean mhic*, "daughter of the line of."

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

ing their cousin to go so far away, they did not want to lose her, as she not only cooked for them and did all that a woman does, including spinning and weaving, but was most sweet and fair to see, and in the long winter nights sang by the hour together, while Gloom played strange wild airs upon his *feadan*, a kind of oaten pipe or flute.

She loved him, I know; but there was this reason also for her going, that she was afraid of Gloom. Often upon the moor or on the hill she turned and hastened home, because she heard the lilt and fall of that *feadan*. It was an eerie thing to her, to be going through the twilight when she thought the three men were in the house, smoking after their supper, and suddenly to hear beyond and coming toward her the shrill song of that oaten flute, playing "The Dance of the Dead," or "The Flow and Ebb," or "The Shadow-Reel."

That, sometimes at least, he knew she was there was clear to her, because, as she stole rapidly through the tangled fern and gale, she would hear a mocking laugh follow her like a leaping thing.

Mànus was not there on the night when she told Marcus and his brothers that she was going. He was in the haven on board the *Luath*, with his two mates, he singing in the

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

moonshine as all three sat mending their fishing gear.

After the supper was done, the three brothers sat smoking and talking over an offer that had been made about some Shetland sheep. For a time, Anne watched them in silence. They were not like brothers, she thought. Marcus, tall, broad-shouldered, with yellow hair and strangely dark blue-black eyes and black eyebrows; stern, with a weary look on his sun-brown face. The light from the peats glinted upon the tawny curve of thick hair that trailed from his upper lip, for he had the *caisean-feusag* of the Northmen. Gloom, slighter of build, dark of hue and hair, but with hairless face; with thin, white, long-fingered hands that had ever a nervous motion, as though they were tide-wrack. There was always a frown on the centre of his forehead, even when he smiled with his thin lips and dusky, unbetraying eyes. He looked what he was, the brain of the Achannas. Not only did he have the English as though native to that tongue, but could and did read strange unnecessary books. Moreover, he was the only son of Robert Achanna to whom the old man had imparted his store of learning, for Achanna had been a schoolmaster in his youth, in Galloway, and he had intended Gloom for the

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

priesthood. His voice, too, was low and clear, but cold as pale-green water running under ice. As for Seumas, he was more like Marcus than Gloom, though not so fair. He had the same brown hair and shadowy hazel eyes, the same pale and smooth face, with something of the same intent look which characterised the long-time missing, and probably dead, eldest brother, Alasdair. He, too, was tall and gaunt. On Seumas's face there was that indescribable, as to some of course imperceptible, look which is indicated by the phrase "the dusk of the shadow," though few there are who know what they mean by that, or, knowing, are fain to say.

Suddenly, and without any word or reason for it, Gloom turned and spoke to her.

"Well, Anne, and what is it?"

"I did not speak, Gloom."

"True for you *mo cailinn*. But it's about to speak you were."

"Well, and that is true. Marcus, and you Gloom, and you Seumas, I have that to tell which you will not be altogether glad for the hearing. 'Tis about—about—me and—and Mànus."

There was no reply at first. The three brothers sat looking at her like the kye at a stranger on the moorland. There was a deep-

ening of the frown on Gloom's brow, but when Anne looked at him his eyes fell and dwelt in the shadow at his feet. Then Marcus spoke in a low voice:

"Is it Mànus MacCodrum you will be meaning?"

"Ay, sure."

Again silence. Gloom did not lift his eyes, and Seumas was now staring at the peats. Marcus shifted uneasily.

"And what will Mànus MacCodrum be wanting?"

"Sure, Marcus, you know well what I mean. Why do you make this thing hard for me? There is but one thing he would come here wanting. And he has asked me if I will go with him; and I have said yes; and if you are not willing that he come again with the minister, or that we go across to the kirk in Berneray of Uist in the Sound of Harris, then I will not stay under this roof another night, but will go away from Eilamore at sunrise in the *Luath*, that is now in the haven. And that is for the hearing and knowing, Marcus and Gloom and Seumas!"

Once more, silence followed her speaking. It was broken in a strange way. Gloom slipped his feadan into his hands, and so to his mouth. The clear, cold notes of the flute

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

filled the flame-lit room. It was as though white polar birds were drifting before the coming of snow.

The notes slid in to a wild, remote air: cold moonlight on the dark o' the sea, it was. It was the *Dàn-nan-Ròn*.

Anne flushed, trembled, and then abruptly rose. As she leaned on her clenched right hand upon the table, the light of the peats showed that her eyes were aflame.

“Why do you play *that* Gloom Achanna?”

The man finished the bar, then blew into the oaten pipe, before, just glancing at the girl, he replied:

“And what harm will there be in *that*, Anna-ban?”

“You know it is harm. That is the ‘*Dàn-nan-Ròn*’!”

“Ay, and what then, Anna-ban?”

“What then? Are you thinking I don't know what you mean by playing the ‘*Song o' the Seals*’?”

With an abrupt gesture Gloom put the feadan aside. As he did so, he rose.

“See here, Anne,” he began roughly, when Marcus intervened.

“That will do just now, Gloom. *Anne-à-ghraidh*, do you mean that you are going to do this thing?”

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

"Ay, sure."

"Do you know why Gloom played the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'?"

"It was a cruel thing."

"You know what is said in the isles about—about—this or that man, who is under *gheasan*, who is spell-bound and—and—about the seals—"

"Yes, Marcus, it is knowing it that I am: '*Tha iad a' cantuinn gur h-e daoine fo gheasan a th' anns no roin.*'"

"*'They say that seals,'*" he repeated slowly, "*'They say that seals are men under magic spells.'* And have you ever pondered that thing, Anne, my cousin?"

"I am knowing well what you mean."

"Then you will know that the MacCodrums of North Uist are called the *Sliochd-nan-Ròn?*"

"I have heard."

"And would you be for marrying a man that is of the race of the beasts, and himself knowing what that *geas* means, and who may any day go back to his people?"

"Ah, now, Marcus, sure it is making a mock of me you are. Neither you nor any here believe that foolish thing. How can a man born of a woman be a seal, even though his *sinnsear* were the offspring of the sea-

people, which is not a saying I am believing either, though it may be; and not that it matters much, whatever, about the far-back forbears."

Marcus frowned darkly, and at first made no response. At last he answered, speaking sullenly:

"You may be believing this or you may be believing that, Anna-nic-Gilleasbuig, but two things are as well known as that the east wind brings the blight and the west wind the rain. And one is this: that long ago a Seal-man wedded a woman of North Uist, and that he or his son was called Neil MacCodrum; and that the sea-fever of the seal was in the blood of his line ever after. And this is the other: that twice within the memory of living folk, a MacCodrum has taken upon himself the form of a seal, and has so met his death, once Neil MacCodrum of Ru' Tormaid, and once Anndra MacCodrum of Berneray in the Sound. There's talk of others, but these are known of us all. And you will not be forgetting now that Neildonn was the grandfather, and that Anndra was the brother of the father of Mànus MacCodrum?"

"I am not caring what you say, Marcus. It is all foam of the sea."

"There's no foam without wind or tide,

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Anne, an' it's a dark tide that will be bearing you away to Uist, and a black wind that will be blowing far away behind the East, the wind that will be carrying his death-cry to your ears."

The girl shuddered. The brave spirit in her, however, did not quail.

"Well, so be it. To each his fate. But, seal or no seal, I am going to wed Mànus MacCodrum, who is a man as good as any here, and a true man at that, and the man I love, and that will be my man, God willing, the praise be His!"

Again Gloom took up the feadan, and sent a few cold, white notes floating through the hot room, breaking, suddenly, into the wild, fantastic, opening air of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn."

With a low cry and passionate gesture Anne sprang forward, snatched the oat-flute from his grasp, and would have thrown it in the fire. Marcus held her in an iron grip, however.

"Don't you be minding Gloom, Anne," he said quietly, as he took the feadan from her hand and handed it to his brother: "sure he's only telling you in *his* way what I am telling you in mine."

She shook herself free, and moved to the

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

other side of the table. On the opposite wall hung the dirk which had belonged to old Achanna. This she unfastened. Holding it in her right hand, she faced the three men.

“On the cross of the dirk I swear I will be the woman of Mànus MacCodrum.”

The brothers made no response. They looked at her fixedly.

“And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if any man come between me and Mànus, this dirk will be for his remembering in a certain hour of the day of the days.”

As she spoke, she looked meaningly at Gloom, whom she feared more than Marcus or Seumas.

“And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if evil come to Mànus, this dirk will have another sheath, and that will be my milkless breast; and by that token I now throw the old sheath in the fire.”

As she finished, she threw the sheath on to the burning peats. Gloom quietly lifted it, brushed off the sparks of flame as though they were dust, and put it in his pocket.

“And by the same token, Anne,” he said, “your oaths will come to nought.”

Rising, he made a sign to his brothers to follow. When they were outside he told Seumas to return, and to keep Anne within, by

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

peace if possible, by force if not. Briefly they discussed their plans, and then separated. While Seumas went back, Marcus and Gloom made their way to the haven.

Their black figures were visible in the moonlight, but at first they were not noticed by the men on board the *Luath*, for Mànus was singing.

When the islesman stopped abruptly, one of his companions asked him jokingly if his song had brought a seal alongside, and bid him beware lest it was a woman of the sea-people.

His face darkened, but he made no reply. When the others listened they heard the wild strain of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn" stealing through the moonshine. Staring against the shore, they could discern the two brothers.

"What will be the meaning of that?" asked one of the men, uneasily.

"When a man comes instead of a woman," answered Mànus, slowly, "the young corbies are astir in the nest."

So, it meant blood. Aulay MacNeil and Donull MacDonull put down their gear, rose, and stood waiting for what Mànus would do.

"Ho, there!" he cried.

"Ho-ro!"

"What will you be wanting, Eilanmore?"

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

“ We are wanting a word of you, Mànus MacCodrum. Will you come ashore? ”

“ If you want a word of me, you can come to me.”

“ There is no boat here.”

“ I’ll send the *bàta-beag*.”

When he had spoken, Mànus asked Donull, the younger of his mates, a lad of seventeen, to row to the shore.

“ And bring back no more than one man,” he added, “ whether it be Eilanmore himself or Gloom-mhic-Achanna.”

The rope of the small boat was unfastened, and Donull rowed it swiftly through the moonshine. The passing of a cloud dusked the shore, but they saw him throw a rope for the guiding of the boat alongside the ledge of the landing-place; then the sudden darkening obscured the vision. Donull must be talking, they thought, for two or three minutes elapsed without sign, but at last the boat put off again, and with two figures only. Doubtless the lad had had to argue against the coming of both Marcus and Gloom.

This, in truth, was what Donull had done. But while he was speaking Marcus was staring fixedly beyond him.

“ Who is it that is there? ” he asked, “ there, in the stern? ”

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

“ There is no one there.”

“ I thought I saw the shadow of a man.”

“ Then it was my shadow, Eilanmore.”

Achanna turned to his brother.

“ I see a man’s death there in the boat.”

Gloom quailed for a moment, then laughed low.

“ I see no death of a man sitting in the boat, Marcus, but if I did I am thinking it would dance to the air of the ‘ Dàn-nan-Ròn,’ which is more than the wraith of you or me would do.”

“ It is not a wraith I was seeing, but the death of a man.”

Gloom whispered, and his brother nodded sullenly. The next moment a heavy muffler was round Donull’s mouth; and before he could resist, or even guess what had happened, he was on his face on the shore, bound and gagged. A minute later the oars were taken by Gloom, and the boat moved swiftly out of the inner haven.

As it drew near MÀNUS stared at it intently.

“ That is not Donull that is rowing, Aulay!”

“ No: it will be Gloom Achanna, I’m thinking.”

MacCodrum started. If so, that other figure at the stern was too big for Donull. The

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

cloud passed just as the boat came alongside. The rope was made secure, and then Marcus and Gloom sprang on board.

“Where is Donull MacDonull?” demanded Mànus sharply.

Marcus made no reply, so Gloom answered for him.

“He has gone up to the house with a message to Anne-nic-Gilleasbuig.”

“And what will that message be?”

“That Mànus MacCodrum has sailed away from Eilanmore, and will not see her again.”

MacCodrum laughed. It was a low, ugly laugh.

“Sure, Gloom Achanna, you should be taking that feadan of yours and playing the *Cod-hail-nan-Pairtean*, for I’m thinkin’ the crabs are gathering about the rocks down below us, an’ laughing wi’ their claws.”

“Well, and that is a true thing,” Gloom replied slowly and quietly. “Yes, for sure I might, as you say, be playing the ‘Meeting of the Crabs.’ Perhaps,” he added, as by a sudden afterthought, “perhaps, though it is a calm night, you will be hearing the *comh-thonn*. The ‘slapping of the waves’ is a better thing to be hearing than the ‘Meeting of the Crabs.’”

“If I hear the *comh-thonn* it is not in the

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

way you will be meaning, Gloom-mhic-Achanna. 'Tis not the 'up sail and good-bye' they will be saying, but 'Home wi' the Bride.' ”

Here Marcus intervened.

“ Let us be having no more words, Mànus MacCodrum. The girl Anne is not for you. Gloom is to be her man. So get you hence. If you will be going quiet, it is quiet we will be. If you have your feet on this thing, then you will be having that too which I saw in the boat.”

“ And what was it you saw in the boat, Achanna? ”

“ The death of a man.”

“ So—. And now ” (this after a prolonged silence, wherein the four men stood facing each other) “ is it a blood-matter if not of peace? ”

“ Ay. Go, if you are wise. If not, 'tis your own death you will be making.”

There was a flash as of summer lightning. A bluish flame seemed to leap through the moonshine. Marcus reeled, with a gasping cry; then, leaning back, till his face blanched in the moonlight, his knees gave way. As he fell, he turned half round. The long knife which Mànus had hurled at him had not penetrated his breast more than an inch at most,

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

but as he fell on the deck it was driven into him up to the hilt.

In the blank silence that followed, the three men could hear a sound like the ebb-tide in sea-weed. It was the gurgling of the bloody froth in the lungs of the dead man.

The first to speak was his brother, and then only when thin reddish-white foam-bubbles began to burst from the blue lips of Marcus.

“It is murder.”

He spoke low, but it was like the surf of breakers in the ears of those who heard.

“You have said one part of a true word, Gloom Achanna. It is murder—that you and he came here for!”

“The death of Marcus Achanna is on you, Mànus MacCodrum.”

“So be it, as between yourself and me, or between all of your blood and me; though Aulay MacNeil as well as you can witness that though in self-defence I threw the knife at Achanna, it was his own doing that drove it into him.”

“You can whisper that to the rope when it is round your neck.”

“And what will *you* be doing now, Gloom-mhic-Achanna?”

For the first time Gloom shifted uneasily.

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

A swift glance revealed to him the awkward fact that the boat trailed behind the *Luath*, so that he could not leap into it, while if he turned to haul it close by the rope he was at the mercy of the two men.

"I will go in peace," he said quietly.

"Ay," was the answer, in an equally quiet tone, "in the white peace."

Upon this menace of death the two men stood facing each other.

Achanna broke the silence at last.

"You'll hear the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn' the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum, and lest you doubt it you'll hear it again in your death-hour."

"*Ma tha sin an Dàn*—if that be ordained." Mànus spoke gravely. His very quietude, however, boded ill. There was no hope of clemency; Gloom knew that.

Suddenly he laughed scornfully. Then, pointing with his right hand as if to some one behind his two adversaries, he cried out: "Put the death-hand on them, Marcus! Give them the Grave!" Both men sprang aside, the heart of each nigh upon bursting. The death-touch of the newly slain is an awful thing to incur, for it means that the wraith can transfer all its evil to the person touched.

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

The next moment there was a heavy splash. MÀNUS realised that it was no more than a ruse, and that Gloom had escaped. With feverish haste he hauled in the small boat, leaped into it, and began at once to row so as to intercept his enemy.

Achanna rose once, between him and the *Luath*. MacCodrum crossed the oars in the thole-pins and seized the boat-hook.

The swimmer kept straight for him. Suddenly he dived. In a flash, MÀNUS knew that Gloom was going to rise under the boat, seize the keel, and upset him, and thus probably be able to grip him from above. There was time and no more to leap; and, indeed, scarce had he plunged into the sea ere the boat swung right over, Achanna clambering over it the next moment.

At first Gloom could not see where his foe was. He crouched on the upturned craft, and peered eagerly into the moonlit water. All at once a black mass shot out of the shadow between him and the smack. This black mass laughed—the same low, ugly laugh that had preceded the death of Marcus.

He who was in turn the swimmer was now close. When a fathom away he leaned back and began to tread water steadily. In his

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

right hand he grasped the boat-hook. The man in the boat knew that to stay where he was meant certain death. He gathered himself together like a crouching cat. MÀNUS kept treading the water slowly, but with the hook ready so that the sharp iron spike at the end of it should transfix his foe if he came at him with a leap. Now and again he laughed. Then in his low sweet voice, but brokenly at times between his deep breathings, he began to sing:

The tide was dark, an' heavy with the burden that it bore;
I heard it talkin', whisperin', upon the weedy shore;
Each wave that stirred the sea-weed was like a closing door;
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,

My Grief,
No more!

The tide was in the salt sea-weed, and like a knife it tore;
The wild sea-wind went moaning, soeing, moaning o'er and o'er;
The deep sea-heart was brooding deep upon its ancient lore—
I heard the sob, the soeing sob, the dying sob at its core,

My Grief,
Its core!

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

The white sea-waves were wan and grey its ashy lips
before,
The yeast within its ravening mouth was red with
streaming gore;
O red sea-weed, O red sea-waves, O hollow baffled
roar,
Since one thou hast, O dark dim Sea, why callest
thou for more,

My Grief,
For more!

In the quiet moonlight the chant, with its long, slow cadences, sung as no other man in the isles could sing it, sounded sweet and remote beyond words to tell. The glittering shine was upon the water of the haven, and moved in waving lines of fire along the stone ledges. Sometimes a fish rose, and spilt a ripple of pale gold; or a sea-nettle swam to the surface, and turned its blue or greenish globe of living jelly to the moon dazzle.

The man in the water made a sudden stop in his treading and listened intently. Then once more the phosphorescent light gleamed about his slow-moving shoulders. In a louder chanting voice came once again:

Each wave that stirs the sea-weed is like a closing
door;
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more,
no more,

My Grief,
No more!

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Yes, his quick ears had caught the inland strain of a voice he knew. Soft and white as the moonshine came Anne's singing as she passed along the corrie leading to the haven. In vain his travelling gaze sought her; she was still in the shadow, and, besides, a slow drifting cloud obscured the moonlight. When he looked back again a stifled exclamation came from his lips. There was not a sign of Gloom Achanna. He had slipped noiselessly from the boat, and was now either behind it, or had dived beneath it, or was swimming under water this way or that. If only the cloud would sail by, muttered Mánus, as he held himself in readiness for an attack from beneath or behind. As the dusk lightened, he swam slowly toward the boat, and then swiftly round it. There was no one there. He climbed on to the keel, and stood, leaning forward, as a salmon-leisterer by torchlight, with his spear-pointed boat-hook raised. Neither below nor beyond could he discern any shape. A whispered call to Aulay MacNeil showed that he, too, saw nothing. Gloom must have swooned, and sank deep as he slipped through the water. Perhaps the dog-fish were already darting about him.

Going behind the boat Mánus guided it back to the smack. It was not long before,

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

with MacNeil's help, he righted the punt. One oar had drifted out of sight, but as there was a sculling-hole in the stern that did not matter.

"What shall we do with it?" he muttered, as he stood at last by the corpse of Marcus. "This is a bad night for us, Aulay!"

"Bad it is; but let us be seeing it is not worse. I'm thinking we should have left the boat."

"And for why that?"

"We could say that Marcus Achanna and Gloom Achanna left us again, and that we saw no more of them nor of our boat."

MacCodrum pondered a while. The sound of voices, borne faintly across the water, decided him. Probably Anne and the lad Donull were talking. He slipped into the boat, and with a sail-knife soon ripped it here and there. It filled, and then, heavy with the weight of a great ballast-stone which Aulay had first handed to his companion, and surging with a foot-thrust from the latter, it sank.

"We'll hide the—the man there—behind the windlass, below the spare sail, till we're out at sea, Aulay. Quick, give me a hand!"

It did not take the two men long to lift the corpse, and do as MÀNUS had suggested. They had scarce accomplished this, when Anne's

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

voice came hailing silver-sweet across the water.

With death-white face and shaking limbs, MacCodrum stood holding the mast, while with a loud voice, so firm and strong that Aulay MacNeil smiled below his fear, he asked if the Achannas were back yet, and if so for Donull to row out at once, and she with him if she would come.

It was nearly half an hour thereafter that Anne rowed out toward the *Luath*. She had gone at last along the shore to a creek where one of Marcus's boats was moored and returned with it. Having taken Donull on board, she made way with all speed, fearful lest Gloom or Marcus should intercept her.

It did not take long to explain how she had laughed at Seumas's vain efforts to detain her, and had come down to the haven. As she approached, she heard Mànus singing, and so had herself broken into a song she knew he loved. Then, by the water-edge she had come upon Donull lying upon his back, bound and gagged. After she had released him they waited to see what would happen, but as in the moonlight they could not see any small boat come in, bound to or from the smack, she had hailed to know if Mànus were there.

On his side he said briefly that the two

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Achannas had come to persuade him to leave without her. On his refusal they had departed again, uttering threats against her as well as himself. He heard their quarrelling voices as they rowed into the gloom, but could not see them at last because of the obscured moonlight.

“And now, Ann-mochree,” he added, “is it coming with me you are, and just as you are? Sure, you’ll never repent it, and you’ll have all you want that I can give. Dear of my heart, say that you will be coming away this night of the nights! By the Black Stone on Icolmkill I swear it, and by the Sun, and by the Moon, and by Himself!”

“I am trusting you, Mànus dear. Sure it is not for me to be going back to that house after what has been done and said. I go with you, now and always, God save us.”

“Well, dear lass o’ my heart, it’s farewell to Eilanmore it is, for by the Blood on the Cross I’ll never land on it again!”

“And that will be no sorrow to me, Mànus my home!”

And this was the way that my friend Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore to go to the isles of the west.

It was a fair sailing, in the white moon-

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

shine, with a whispering breeze astern. Anne leaned against Mànus, dreaming her dream. The lad Donull sat drowsing at the helm. Forward, Aulay MacNeil, with his face set against the moonshine to the west, brooded dark.

Though no longer was land in sight, and there was peace among the deeps of the quiet stars and upon the sea, the shadow of fear was upon the face of Mànus MacCodrum.

This might well have been because of the as yet unburied dead that lay beneath the spare sail by the windlass. The dead man, however, did not affright him. What went moaning in his heart, and sighing and calling in his brain, was a faint falling echo he had heard, as the *Luath* glided slow out of the haven. Whether from the water or from the shore he could not tell, but he heard the wild, fantastic air of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," as he had heard it that very night upon the feadan of Gloom Achanna.

It was his hope that his ears had played him false. When he glanced about him, and saw the sombre flame in the eyes of Aulay MacNeil, staring at him out of the dusk, he knew that which Oisìn the son of Fionn cried in his pain: "his soul swam in mist."

II

For all the evil omens, the marriage of Anne and Mànus MacCodrum went well. He was more silent than of yore, and men avoided rather than sought him; but he was happy with Anne, and content with his two mates, who were now Callum MacCodrum and Ranauld MacRanauld. The youth Donull had bettered himself by joining a Skye skipper who was a kinsman, and Aulay MacNeil had surprised every one, except Mànus, by going away as a seaman on board one of the *Loch* line of ships which sail for Australia from the Clyde.

Anne never knew what had happened, though it is possible she suspected somewhat. All that was known to her was that Marcus and Gloom Achanna had disappeared, and were supposed to have been drowned. There was now no Achanna upon Eilanmore, for Seumas had taken a horror of the place and his loneliness. As soon as it was commonly admitted that his two brothers must have drifted out to sea, and been drowned, or at best picked up by some ocean-going ship, he disposed of the island-farm, and left Eilanmore forever. All this confirmed the thing said among the islanders of the west, that old

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Robert Achanna had brought a curse with him. Blight and disaster had visited Eilannmore over and over in the many years he had held it, and death, sometimes tragic or mysterious, had overtaken six of his seven sons, while the youngest bore upon his brows the "dusk of the shadow." True, none knew for certain that three out of the six were dead, but few for a moment believed in the possibility that Alasdair and Marcus and Gloom were alive. On the night when Anne had left the island with Mànus MacCòdrum, he, Seumas, had heard nothing to alarm him. Even when, an hour after she had gone down to the haven, neither she nor his brothers had returned, and the *Luath* had put out to sea, he was not in fear of any ill. Clearly, Marcus and Gloom had gone away in the smack, perhaps determined to see that the girl was duly married by priest or minister. He would have perturbed himself little for days to come, but for a strange thing that happened that night. He had returned to the house because of a chill that was upon him, and convinced too that all had sailed in the *Luath*. He was sitting brooding by the peat-fire, when he was startled by a sound at the window at the back of the room. A few bars of a familiar air struck painfully upon his ear, though played

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

so low that they were just audible. What could it be but the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," and who would be playing that but Gloom? What did it mean? Perhaps after all, it was fantasy only, and there was no feadan out there in the dark. He was pondering this when, still low but louder and sharper than before, there rose and fell the strain which he hated, and Gloom never played before him, that of the *Dàvsa-na-mairv*, the "Dance of the Dead." Swiftly and silently he rose and crossed the room. In the dark shadows cast by the byre he could see nothing, but the music ceased. He went out, and searched everywhere, but found no one. So he returned, took down the Holy Book, with awed heart, and read slowly till peace came upon him, soft and sweet as the warmth of the peat-glow.

But as for Anne, she had never even this hint that one of the supposed dead might be alive, or that, being dead, Gloom might yet touch a shadowy feadan into a wild remote air of the grave.

When month after month went by, and no hint of ill came to break upon their peace, Mànus grew light-hearted again. Once more his songs were heard as he came back from the fishing, or loitered ashore mending his nets. A new happiness was nigh to them, for Anne

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

was with child. True, there was fear also, for the girl was not well at the time when her labour was near, and grew weaker daily. There came a day when Mànus had to go to Loch Boisdale in South Uist: and it was with pain and something of foreboding that he sailed away from Berneray in the Sound of Harris, where he lived. It was on the third night that he returned. He was met by Katreen MacRanald, the wife of his mate, with the news that on the morrow after his going Anne had sent for the priest who was staying at Loch Maddy, for she had felt the coming of death. It was that very evening she died, and took the child with her.

Mànus heard as one in a dream. It seemed to him that the tide was ebbing in his heart, and a cold, sleety rain falling, falling through a mist in his brain.

Sorrow lay heavily upon him. After the earthing of her whom he loved, he went to and fro solitary: often crossing the Narrows and going to the old Pictish Towre under the shadow of Ban Breac. He would not go upon the sea, but let his kinsman Callum do as he liked with the *Luath*.

Now and again Father Allan MacNeil sailed northward to see him. Each time he departed sadder. "The man is going mad, I

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

fear," he said to Callum, the last time he saw Mànus.

The long summer nights brought peace and beauty to the isles. It was a great herring-year, and the moon-fishing was unusually good. All the Uist men who lived by the sea-harvest were in their boats whenever they could. The pollack, the dogfish, the otters, and the seals, with flocks of sea-fowl beyond number, shared in the common joy. Mànus MacCodrum alone paid no heed to herring or mackerel. He was often seen striding along the shore, and more than once had been heard laughing; sometimes, too, he was come upon at low tide by the great Reef of Berneray, singing wild strange runes and songs, or crouching upon a rock and brooding dark.

The midsummer moon found no man on Berneray except MacCodrum, the Rev. Mr. Black, the minister of the Free Kirk, and an old man named Anndra McIan. On the night before the last day of the middle month, Anndra was reproved by the minister for saying that he had seen a man rise out of one of the graves in the kirk-yard, and steal down by the stone-dykes towards Balnahunnur-samona,¹ where Mànus MacCodrum lived.

¹ *Baille-'na-aonàr'sa mhonadh*, "the solitary farm on the hill-slope."

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

“The dead do not rise and walk, Anndra.”

“That may be, maigstir, but it may have been the Watcher of the Dead. Sure it is not three weeks since Padruig McAlistair was laid beneath the green mound. He’ll be wearying for another to take his place.”

“Hoots, man, that is an old superstition. The dead do not rise and walk, I tell you.”

“It is right you may be, maigstir, but I heard of this from my father, that was old before you were young, and from his father before him. When the last-buried is weary with being the Watcher of the Dead he goes about from place to place till he sees man, woman, or child with the death-shadow in the eyes, and then he goes back to his grave and lies down in peace, for his vigil it will be over now.”

The minister laughed at the folly, and went into his house to make ready for the Sacrament that was to be on the morrow. Old Anndra, however, was uneasy. After the porridge, he went down through the gloaming to Balnahunnur-sa-mona. He meant to go in and warn Mànus MacCodrum. But when he got to the west wall, and stood near the open window, he heard Mànus speaking in a loud voice, though he was alone in the room.

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

“B'ionganntach do ghràdh dhomhsa, a' toirt barrachd air gràdh nam ban!” . . .¹

This, Mànus cried in a voice quivering with pain. Anndra stopped still, fearful to intrude, fearful also, perhaps, to see some one there beside MacCodrum whom eyes should not see. Then the voice rose into a cry of agony.

“Aoram dhuit, ay an dèigh dhomh fàs aosda!”²

With that, Anndra feared to stay. As he passed the byre he started, for he thought he saw the shadow of a man. When he looked closer he could see nought, so went his way, trembling and sore troubled.

It was dusk when Mànus came out. He saw that it was to be a cloudy night; and perhaps it was this that, after a brief while, made him turn in his aimless walk and go back to the house. He was sitting before the flaming heart of the peats, brooding in his pain, when suddenly he sprang to his feet.

Loud and clear, and close as though played under the very window of the room, came the cold, white notes of an oaten flute. Ah, too well he knew that wild, fantastic air.

¹ “Thy love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.”

² “I shall worship thee, ay, even after I have become old.”

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Who could it be but Gloom Achanna, playing upon his feadan; and what air of all airs could that be but the "Dàn-nan-Ròn"?

Was it the dead man, standing there unseen in the shadow of the Grave? Was Marcus beside him, Marcus with the knife still thrust up to the hilt, and the lung-foam upon his lips? Can the sea give up its dead? Can there be strain of any feadan that ever was made of man, there in the Silence?

In vain Mànus MacCodrum tortured himself thus. Too well he knew that he had heard the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," and that no other than Gloom Achanna was the player.

Suddenly an access of fury wrought him to madness. With an abrupt lilt the tune swung into the *Davsà-na-mairv*, and thence, after a few seconds, and in a moment, into that mysterious and horrible *Codhail-nan-Pairtean* which none but Gloom played.

There could be no mistake now, nor as to what was meant by the muttering, jerking air of the "gathering of the crabs."

With a savage cry Mànus snatched up a long dirk from its place by the chimney, and rushed out.

There was not the shadow of a sea-gull even in front; so he sped round by the byre.

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Neither was anything unusual discoverable there.

“Sorrow upon me,” he cried; “man or wraith, I will be putting it to the dirk!”

But there was no one; nothing; not a sound.

Then, at last, with a listless droop of his arms, MacCodrum turned and went into the house again. He remembered what Gloom Achanna had said: “*You’ll hear the ‘Dàn-nan-Ròn’ the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum, and lest you doubt it, you’ll hear it in your death-hour.*”

He did not stir from the fire for three hours; then he rose, and went over to his bed and lay down without undressing.

He did not sleep, but lay listening and watching. The peats burned low, and at last there was scarce a flicker along the floor. Outside he could hear the wind moaning upon the sea. By a strange rustling sound he knew that the tide was ebbing across the great reef that runs out from Berneray. By midnight the clouds had gone. The moon shone clear and full. When he heard the clock strike in its worm-eaten, rickety case, he sat up, and listened intently. He could hear nothing. No shadow stirred. Surely if the wraith of Gloom Achanna were waiting for him it would make some sign, now, in the dead of night.

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

An hour passed. Mànus rose, crossed the room on tip-toe, and soundlessly opened the door. The salt wind blew fresh against his face. The smell of the shore, of wet seawrack and pungent bog-myrtle, of foam and moving water, came sweet to his nostrils. He heard a skua calling from the rocky promontory. From the slopes behind, the wail of a moon-restless lapwing rose and fell mournfully.

Crouching and with slow, stealthy step, he stole round by the seaward wall. At the dyke he stopped, and scrutinised it on each side. He could see for several hundred yards, and there was not even a sheltering sheep. Then, soundlessly as ever, he crept close to the byre. He put his ear to chink after chink: but not a stir of a shadow even. As a shadow, himself, he drifted lightly to the front, past the hay-rick; then, with swift glances to right and left, opened the door and entered. As he did so, he stood as though frozen. Surely, he thought, that was a sound as of a step, out there by the hay-rick. A terror was at his heart. In front, the darkness of the byre, with God knows what dread thing awaiting him; behind, a mysterious walker in the night, swift to take him unawares. The trembling that came upon him was nigh overmastering. At

last, with a great effort, he moved towards the ledge, where he kept a candle. With shaking hand he struck a light. The empty byre looked ghostly and fearsome in the flickering gloom. But there was no one, nothing. He was about to turn, when a rat ran along a loose hanging beam, and stared at him, or at the yellow shine. He saw its black eyes shining like peat-water in moonlight.

The creature was curious at first, then indifferent. At least, it began to squeak, and then make a swift scratching with its fore-paws. Once or twice came an answering squeak; a faint rustling was audible here and there among the straw.

With a sudden spring Mànus seized the beast. Even in the second in which he raised it to his mouth and scrunched its back with his strong teeth, it bit him severely. He let his hands drop, and grope furtively in the darkness. With stooping head he shook the last breath out of the rat, holding it with his front teeth, with back-curved lips. The next moment he dropped the dead thing, trampled upon it, and burst out laughing. There was a scurrying of pattering feet, a rustling of straw. Then silence again. A draught from the door had caught the flame and extinguished it. In the silence and darkness MacCodrum

stood, intent, but no longer afraid. He laughed again, because it was so easy to kill with the teeth. The noise of his laughter seemed to him to leap hither and thither like a shadowy ape. He could see it: a blackness within the darkness. Once more he laughed. It amused him to see the *thing* leaping about like that.

Suddenly he turned, and walked out into the moonlight. The lapwing was still circling and wailing. He mocked it, with loud shrill *pēē-wēēty*, *pēē-wēēty*, *pēē-wēēt*. The bird swung waywardly, alarmed: its abrupt cry, and dancing flight aroused its fellows. The air was full of the lamentable crying of plovers.

A sough of the sea came inland. Mānus inhaled its breath with a sigh of delight. A passion for the running wave was upon him. He yearned to feel green water break against his breast. Thirst and hunger, too, he felt at last, though he had known neither all day. How cool and sweet, he thought, would be a silver haddock, or even a brown-backed liath, alive and gleaming, wet with the sea-water still bubbling in its gills. It would writhe, just like the rat; but then how he would throw his head back, and toss the glittering thing up into the moonlight, catch it on the downwhirl just as it neared the wave on whose crest he

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

was, and then devour it with swift voracious gulps!

With quick, jerky steps he made his way past the landward side of the small, thatch-roofed cottage. He was about to enter, when he noticed that the door, which he had left ajar, was closed. He stole to the window and glanced in.

A single, thin, wavering moonbeam flickered in the room. But the flame at the heart of the peats had worked its way through the ash, and there was now a dull glow, though that was within the "smoothing," and threw scarce more than a glimmer into the room.

There was enough light, however, for Mànus MacCodrum to see that a man sat on the three-legged stool before the fire. His head was bent, as though he were listening. The face was away from the window. It was his own wraith, of course; of that, Mànus felt convinced. What was it doing there? Perhaps it had eaten the Holy Book, so that it was beyond his putting a *rosad* on it! At the thought he laughed loud. The shadow-man leaped to his feet.

The next moment MacCodrum swung himself on to the thatched roof, and clambered from rope to rope, where these held down the big stones which acted as dead-weight for

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

thatch, against the fury of tempests. Stone after stone he tore from its fastenings, and hurled to the ground over beyond the door. Then with tearing hands he began to burrow an opening in the thatch. All the time he whined like a beast.

He was glad the moon shone full upon him. When he had made a big enough hole, he would see the evil thing out of the grave that sat in his room and would stone it to death.

Suddenly he became still. A cold sweat broke out upon him. The thing, whether his own wraith, or the spirit of his dead foe, or Gloom Achanna himself, had begun to play, low and slow, a wild air. No piercing, cold music like that of the feadan! Too well he knew it, and those cool, white notes that moved here and there in the darkness like snowflakes. As for the air, though he slept till Judgment Day and heard but a note of it amidst all the clamour of heaven and hell, sure he would scream because of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn."

The "Dàn-nan-Ròn": the *Roin!* the Seals! Ah, what was he doing there, on the bitter-weary land! Out there was the sea. Safe would he be in the green waves.

With a leap he was on the ground. Seizing a huge stone he hurled it through the win-

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

dow. Then, laughing and screaming, he fled towards the Great Reef, along whose sides the ebb-tide gurgled and sobbed, with glistening white foam.

He ceased screaming or laughing as he heard the "Dàn-nan-Ròn" behind him, faint, but following; sure, following. Bending low, he raced towards the rock-ledges from which ran the reef.

When at last he reached the extreme ledge he stopped abruptly. Out on the reef he saw from ten to twenty seals, some swimming to and fro, others clinging to the reef, one or two making a curious barking sound, with round heads lifted against the moon. In one place there was a surge and lashing of water. Two bulls were fighting to the death.

With swift, stealthy movements Månus unclothed himself. The damp had clotted the leathern thongs of his boots, and he snarled with curled lip as he tore at them. He shone white in the moonshine, but was sheltered from the sea by the ledge behind which he crouched. "What did Gloom Achanna mean by that?" he muttered savagely, as he heard the nearing air change into the "Dance of the Dead." For a moment Månus was a man again. He was nigh upon turning to face his foe, corpse or wraith or living body; to spring

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

at this thing which followed him, and tear it with hands and teeth. Then, once more, the hated "Song of the Seals" stole mockingly through the night.

With a shiver he slipped into the dark water. Then with quick, powerful strokes he was in the moon-flood, and swimming hard against it out by the leese of the reef.

So intent were the seals upon the fight of the two great bulls that they did not see the swimmer, or if they did, took him for one of their own people. A savage snarling and barking and half-human crying came from them. Mânus was almost within reach of the nearest, when one of the combatants sank dead, with torn throat. The victor clambered on the reef, and leaned high, swaying its great head and shoulders to and fro. In the moonlight its white fangs were like red coral. Its blinded eyes ran with gore.

There was a rush, a rapid leaping and swirling, as Mânus surged in among the seals, which were swimming round the place where the slain bull had sunk.

The laughter of this long, white seal terrified them.

When his knees struck against a rock, Mac-Codrum groped with his arms, and hauled himself out of the water.

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

From rock to rock and ledge to ledge
he went, with a fantastic, dancing motion,
his body gleaming foam-white in the moon-
shine.

As he pranced and trampled along the
weedy ledges, he sang snatches of an old
rune—the lost rune of the MacCodrums of
Uist. The seals on the rocks crouched spell-
bound; those slow-swimming in the water
stared with brown unwinking eyes, with their
small ears strained against the sound:

It is I, Mànus MacCodrum,
I am telling you that, you, Anndra of my blood,
And you, Neil my grandfather, and you, and you,
and you!
Ay, ay, Mànus my name is, Mànus Mac Mànus!
It is I myself, and no other.
Your brother, O Seals of the Sea!
Give me blood of the red fish,
And a bite of the flying *sgadan*:
The green wave on my belly,
And the foam in my eyes!
I am your bull-brother, O Bulls of the Sea,
Bull—better than any of you, snarling bulls!
Come to me, mate, seal of the soft, furry womb,
White am I still, though red shall I be,
Red with the streaming red blood if any dispute me!
Aoh, aoh, aoh, arò, arò, ho-rò!
A man was I, a seal am I,
My fangs churn the yellow foam from my lips:
Give way to me, give way to me, Seals of the Sea;

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Give way, for I am fëy of the sea
And the sea-maiden I see there,
And my name, true, is Mànus MacCodrum,
The bull-seal that was a man, Arà! Arà!

By this time he was close upon the great black seal, which was still monotonously swaying its gory head, with its sightless eyes rolling this way and that. The sea-folk seemed fascinated. None moved, even when the dancer in the moonshine trampled upon them.

When he came within arm-reach he stopped. "Are you the Ceann-Cinnidh?" he cried. "Are you the head of this clan of the sea-folk?"

The huge beast ceased its swaying. Its curled lips moved from its fangs.

"Speak, Seal, if there's no curse upon you! Maybe, now, you'll be Anndra himself, the brother of my father! Speak! *H'st—are you hearing that music on the shore?* 'Tis the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'! Death o' my soul, it's the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'! Aha, 'tis Gloom Achanna out of the Grave. Back, beast, and let me move on!"

With that, seeing the great bull did not move, he struck it full in the face with clenched fist. There was a hoarse, strangling roar, and the seal champion was upon him with lacerating fangs.

The Dàn-Nan-Ròn

Mànus swayed this way and that. All he could hear now was the snarling and growling and choking cries of the maddened seals. As he fell, they closed in upon him. His screams wheeled through the night like mad birds. With desperate fury he struggled to free himself. The great bull pinned him to the rock; a dozen others tore at his white flesh, till his spouting blood made the rocks scarlet in the white shine of the moon.

For a few seconds he still fought savagely, tearing with teeth and hands. Once, a red irreconisable mass, he staggered to his knees. A wild cry burst from his lips, when from the shore-end of the reef came loud and clear the lilt of the rune of his fate.

The next moment he was dragged down and swept from the reef into the sea. As the torn and mangled body disappeared from sight, it was amid a seething crowd of leaping and struggling seals, their eyes wild with affright and fury, their fangs red with human gore.

And Gloom Achanna, turning upon the reef, moved swiftly inland, playing low on his feadan, as he went.

GREEN BRANCHES

In the year that followed the death of Mànus MacCodrum, James Achanna saw nothing of his brother Gloom. He might have thought himself alone in the world, of all his people, but for a letter that came to him out of the west. True, he had never accepted the common opinion that his brothers had both been drowned on that night when Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore with Mànus. In the first place, he had nothing of that inner conviction concerning the fate of Gloom which he had concerning that of Marcus; in the next, had he not heard the sound of the feadan, which no one that he knew played, except Gloom; and, for further token, was not the tune that which he hated above all others—the “Dance of the Dead”—for who but Gloom would be playing that, he hating it so, and the hour being late, and no one else on Eilanmore? It was no sure thing that the dead had not come back; but the more he thought of it the more Achanna believed that his sixth brother was

Green Branches

still alive. Of this, however, he said nothing to any one.

It was as a man set free that, at last, after long waiting and patient trouble with the disposal of all that was left of the Achanna heritage, he left the island. It was a grey memory for him. The bleak moorland of it, the blight that had lain so long and so often upon the crops, the rains that had swept the isle for grey days and grey weeks and grey months, the sobbing of the sea by day and its dark moan by night, its dim relinquishing sigh in the calm of dreary ebbs, its hollow, baffling roar when the storm-shadow swept up out of the sea—one and all oppressed him, even in memory. He had never loved the island, even when it lay green and fragrant in the green and white seas under white and blue skies, fresh and sweet as an Eden of the sea. He had ever been lonely and weary, tired of the mysterious shadow that lay upon his folk, caring little for any of his brothers except the eldest—long since mysteriously gone out of the ken of man—and almost hating Gloom, who had ever borne him a grudge because of his beauty, and because of his likeness to and reverent heed for Alasdair. Moreover, ever since he had come to love Katreen Macarthur, the daughter of Donald Macarthur who lived in Sleat of

Green Branches

Skye, he had been eager to live near her; the more eager as he knew that Gloom loved the girl also, and wished for success not only for his own sake, but so as to put a slight upon his younger brother.

So, when at last he left the island, he sailed southward gladly. He was leaving Eilanmore; he was bound to a new home in Skye, and perhaps he was going to his long-delayed, long-dreamed-of happiness. True, Katreen was not pledged to him; he did not even know for sure if she loved him. He thought, hoped, dreamed, almost believed that she did; but then there was her cousin Ian, who had long wooed her, and to whom old Donald Macarthur had given his blessing. Nevertheless, his heart would have been lighter than it had been for long, but for two things. First, there was the letter. Some weeks earlier he had received it, not recognising the writing, because of the few letters he had ever seen, and, moreover, as it was in a feigned hand. With difficulty he had deciphered the manuscript, plain printed though it was. It ran thus:

Well, Seumas, my brother, it is wondering if I am dead, you will be. Maybe ay, and maybe no. But I send you this writing to let you see that I know all you do and think of. So you are going to leave

Green Branches

Eilanmore without an Achanna upon it? And you will be going to Sleat in Skye? Well, let me be telling you this thing. *Do not go.* I see blood there. And there is this, too: neither you nor any man shall take Katreen away from me. *You* know that; and Ian Macarthur knows it; and Katreen knows it; and that holds whether I am alive or dead. I say to you: do not go. It will be better for you, and for all. Ian Macarthur is away in the north-sea with the whaler-captain who came to us at Eilanmore, and will not be back for three months yet. It will be better for him not to come back. But if he comes back he will have to reckon with the man who says that Katreen Macarthur is his. I would rather not have two men to speak to, and one my brother. It does not matter to you where I am. I want no money just now. But put aside my portion for me. Have it ready for me against the day I call for it. I will not be patient that day; so have it ready for me. In the place that I am I am content. You will be saying: why is my brother away in a remote place (I will say this to you: that it is not further north than St. Kilda nor further south than the Mull of Cantyre!), and for what reason? That is between me and silence. But perhaps you think of Anne sometimes. Do you know that she lies under the green grass? And of Mánus MacCordrum? They say that he swam out into the sea and was drowned; and they whisper of the seal-blood, though the minister is wrath with them for that. He calls it a madness. Well, I was there at that madness, and I played to it on my *feadan*. And now, Seumas, can you be thinking of what the tune was that I played?

Your brother, who waits his own day,

GLOOM.

Green Branches

Do not be forgetting this thing: *I would rather not be playing the 'Damhsa-na-mairbh.'* It was an ill hour for Mànus when he heard the 'Dàn-nan-Ron;' it was the song of his soul, that; and yours is the 'Davsana-Mairv.'

This letter was ever in his mind: this, and what happened in the gloaming when he sailed away for Skye in the herring-smack of two men who lived at Armadale in Sleat. For, as the boat moved slowly out of the haven, one of the men asked him if he was sure that no one was left upon the island; for he thought he had seen a figure on the rocks, waving a black scarf. Achanna shook his head; but just then his companion cried that at that moment he had seen the same thing. So the smack was put about, and when she was moving slow through the haven again, Achanna sculled ashore in the little coggly punt. In vain he searched here and there, calling loudly again and again. Both men could hardly have been mistaken, he thought. If there were no human creature on the island, and if their eyes had not played them false, who could it be? The wraith of Marcus, mayhap; or might it be the old man himself (his father), risen to bid farewell to his youngest son, or to warn him?

It was no use to wait longer, so, looking

Green Branches

often behind him, he made his way to the boat again, and rowed slowly out towards the smack.

Jerk—jerk—jerk across the water came, low but only too loud for him, the opening motif of the "Damhsa-na-Mairbh." A horror came upon him, and he drove the boat through the water so that the sea splashed over the bows. When he came on deck, he cried in a hoarse voice to the man next him to put up the helm, and let the smack swing to the wind.

"There is no one there, Callum Campbell," he whispered.

"And who is it that will be making that strange music?"

"What music?"

"Sure it has stopped now, but I heard it clear, and so did Anndra MacEwan. It was like the sound of a reed-pipe, and the tune was an eerie one at that."

"It was the Dance of the Dead."

"And who will be playing that?" asked the man, with fear in his eyes.

"No living man."

"No living man?"

"No. I'm thinking it will be one of my brothers who was drowned here, and by the same token that it is Gloom, for he

Green Branches

played upon the feadan. But if not, then—then——”

The two men waited in breathless silence, each trembling with superstitious fear; but at last the elder made a sign to Achanna to finish.

“Then—it will be the Kelpie.”

“Is there—is there one of the—the cave-women here?”

“It is said; and you know of old that the Kelpie sings or plays a strange tune to wile seamen to their death.”

At that moment, the fantastic, jerking music came loud and clear across the bay. There was a horrible suggestion in it, as if dead bodies were moving along the ground with long jerks, and crying and laughing wild. It was enough; the men, Campbell and MacEwan, would not now have waited longer if Achanna had offered them all he had in the world. Nor were they, or he, out of their panic haste till the smack stood well out at sea, and not a sound could be heard from Eilanmore.

They stood watching, silent. Out of the dusky mass that lay in the seaward way to the north came a red gleam. It was like an eye staring after them with blood-red glances.

Green Branches

“What is that, Achanna?” asked one of the men at last.

“It looks as though a fire had been lit in the house up in the island. The door and the window must be open. The fire must be fed with wood, for no peats would give that flame; and there were none lit when I left. To my knowing, there was no wood for burning except the wood of the shelves and the bed.”

“And who would be doing that?”

“I know of that no more than you do, Calum Campbell.”

No more was said, and it was a relief to all when the last glimmer of the light was absorbed in the darkness.

At the end of the voyage Campbell and MacEwan were well pleased to be quit of their companion; not so much because he was moody and distraught, as because they feared that a spell was upon him—a fate in the working of which they might become involved. It needed no vow of the one to the other for them to come to the conclusion that they would never land on Eilanmore, or, if need be, only in broad daylight and never alone.

The days went well for James Achanna, where he made his home at Ranza-beag, on Ranza Water in the Sleat of Skye. The farm

was small but good, and he hoped that with help and care he would soon have the place as good a farm as there was in all Skye.

Donald Macarthur did not let him see much of Katreen, but the old man was no longer opposed to him. Seumas must wait, till Ian Macarthur came back again, which might be any day now. For sure, James Achanna of Ranza-beag was a very different person from the youngest of the Achanna-folk who held by on lonely Eilanmore; moreover, the old man could not but think with pleasure that it would be well to see Katreen able to walk over the whole land of Ranza from the cairn at the north of his own Ranza-Mòr to the burn at the south of Ranza-beag, and know it for her own.

But Achanna was ready to wait. Even before he had the secret word of Katreen he knew her from her beautiful dark eyes that she loved him. As the weeks went by they managed to meet often, and at last Katreen told him that she loved him too, and would have none but him; but that they must wait till Ian came back, because of the pledge given to him by her father. They were days of joy for him. Through many a hot noontide hour, through many a gloaming, he went as one in a dream. Whenever he saw a birch swaying

Green Branches

in the wind, or a wave leaping upon Loch Liath, that was near his home, or passed a bush covered with wild roses, or saw the moonbeams lying white on the boles of the pines, he thought of Katreen—his fawn for grace, and so lithe and tall, with sunbrown face and wavy, dark mass of hair, and shadowy eyes and rowan-red lips. It is said that there is a god clothed in shadow who goes to and fro among the human kind, putting silence between lovers with his waving hands, and breathing a chill out of his cold breath, and leaving a gulf of deep water flowing between them because of the passing of his feet. That shadow never came their way. Their love grew as a flower fed by rains and warmed by sunlight.

When midsummer came, and there was no sign of Ian Macarthur, it was already too late. Katreen had been won.

During the summer months, it was the custom for Katreen and two of the farm-girls to go up Maol-Ranza, to reside at the shealing of Cnoc-an-Fhraoch: and this because of the hill-pasture for the sheep. Cnoc-an-Fhraoch is a round, boulder-studded hill covered with heather, which has a precipitous corrie on each side, and in front slopes down to Lochan Fraoch, a lochlet surrounded by dark woods.

Green Branches

Behind the hill, or great hillock rather, lay the shealing. At each week-end Katreen went down to Ranza-Mòr, and on every Monday morning at sunrise returned to her heather-girt eyrie. It was on one of these visits that she endured a cruel shock. Her father told her that she must marry some one else than Seumas Achanna. He had heard words about him which made a union impossible, and, indeed, he hoped that the man would leave Ranza-beag. In the end, he admitted that what he had heard was to the effect that Achanna was under a doom of some kind; that he was involved in a blood feud; and, moreover, that he was fëy. The old man would not be explicit as to the person from whom his information came, but hinted that he was a stranger of rank, probably a laird of the isles. Besides this, there was word of Ian Macarthur. He was at Thurso, in the far north, and would be in Skye before long, and he—her father—had written to him that he might wed Katreen as soon as was practicable.

“Do you see that lintie yonder, father?” was her response to this.

“Ay, lass, and what about the birdeen?”

“Well, when she mates with a hawk, so will I be mating with Ian Macarthur, but not till then.”

Green Branches

With that she turned, and left the house, and went back to Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. On the way she met Achanna.

It was that night that for the first time he swam across Lochan Fraoch to meet Katreen.

The quickest way to reach the shealing was to row across the lochlet, and then ascend by a sheep-path that wound through the hazel copses at the base of the hill. Fully half an hour was thus saved, because of the steepness of the precipitous corries to right and left. A boat was kept for this purpose, but it was fastened to a shore-boulder by a padlocked iron chain, the key of which was kept by Donald Macarthur. Latterly he had refused to let this key out of his possession. For one thing, no doubt, he believed he could thus restrain Achanna from visiting his daughter. The young man could not approach the shealing from either side without being seen.

But that night, soon after the moon was whitening slow in the dark, Katreen stole down to the hazel copse and awaited the coming of her lover. The lochan was visible from almost any point on Cnoc-an-Fhraoch, as well as from the south side. To cross it in a boat unseen, if any watcher were near, would be impossible, nor could even a swimmer hope to escape notice unless in the gloom of night, or

Green Branches

mayhap, in the dusk. When, however, she saw, half way across the water, a spray of green branches slowly moving athwart the surface, she knew that Seumas was keeping his tryst. If, perchance, any one else saw, he or she would never guess that those derelict rowan-branches shrouded Seumas Achanna.

It was not till the estray had drifted close to the ledge, where, hid among the bracken and the hazel undergrowth, she awaited him, that Katreen descried the face of her lover, as with one hand he parted the green sprays, and stared longingly and lovingly at the figure he could just discern in the dim, fragrant obscurity.

And as it was this night so was it many of the nights that followed. Katreen spent the days as in a dream. Not even the news of her cousin Ian's return disturbed her much.

One day the inevitable meeting came. She was at Ranza-Mòr, and when a shadow came into the dairy where she was standing she looked up and saw Ian before her. She thought he appeared taller and stronger than ever, though still not so tall as Seumas, who would appear slim beside the Herculean Skye man. But as she looked at his close curling black hair and thick bull-neck and the sullen

Green Branches

eyes in his dark wind-red face, she wondered that she had ever tolerated him at all.

He broke the ice at once.

"Tell me, Katreen, are you glad to see me back again?"

"I am glad that you are home once more safe and sound."

"And will you make it my home for me by coming to live with me, as I've asked you again and again?"

"No: as I've told you again and again."

He gloomed at her angrily for a few moments before he resumed.

"I will be asking you this one thing, Katreen, daughter of my father's brother; do you love that man Achanna who lives at Ranza-beag?"

"You may ask the wind why it is from the east or the west, but it won't tell you. You're not the wind's master."

"If you think I will let this man take you away from me, you are thinking a foolish thing."

"And you saying a foolisher."

"Ay?"

"Ay, sure. What could you do, Ian Mhic Ian? At the worst, you could do no more than kill James Achanna. What then? I too would die. You cannot separate us. I would not

marry you, now, though you were the last man on the world and I the last woman."

"You're a fool, Katreen Macarthur. Your father has promised you to me, and I tell you this: if you love Achanna you'll save his life only by letting him go away from here. I promise you he will not be here long."

"Ay, you promise *me*; but you will not say that thing to James Achanna's face. You are a coward."

With a muttered oath the man turned on his heel.

"Let him beware o' me, and you, too, Katreen-mo-nighean-donn. I swear it by my mother's grave and by St. Martin's Cross that you will be mine by hook or by crook."

The girl smiled scornfully. Slowly she lifted a milk-pail.

"It would be a pity to waste the good milk, Ian-gòrach, but if you don't go it is that I will be emptying the pail on you, and then you'll be as white without as your heart is within."

"So you call me witless, do you? *Ian-gòrach!* Well, we shall be seeing as to that. And as for the milk, there will be more than milk spilt because of *you*, Katreen-donn."

From that day, though neither Seumas nor Katreen knew of it, a watch was set upon Achanna.

Green Branches

It could not be long before their secret was discovered, and it was with a savage joy overmastering his sullen rage that Ian Macarthur knew himself the discoverer, and conceived his double vengeance. He dreamed, gloatingly, on both the black thoughts that roamed like ravenous beasts through the solitudes of his heart. But he did not dream that another man was filled with hate because of Katreen's lover, another man who had sworn to make her his own, the man who, disguised, was known in Armadale as Donald McLean, and in the north isles would have been hailed as Gloom Achanna.

There had been steady rain for three days, with a cold, raw wind. On the fourth the sun shone, and set in peace. An evening of quiet beauty followed, warm, fragrant, dusky from the absence of moon or star, though the thin veils of mist promised to disperse as the night grew.

There were two men that eve in the undergrowth on the south side of the lochlet. Seumas had come earlier than his wont. Impatient for the dusk, he could scarce await the waning of the afterglow; surely, he thought, he might venture. Suddenly, his ears caught the sound of cautious footsteps. Could it be old Donald, perhaps with some inkling of the way

Green Branches

in which his daughter saw her lover in despite of all; or, may-hap, might it be Ian Macarthur, tracking him as a hunter stalking a stag by the water-pools? He crouched, and waited. In a few minutes he saw Ian carefully picking his way. The man stooped as he descried the green branches; smiled as, with a low rustling, he raised them from the ground.

Meanwhile yet another man watched and waited, though on the farther side of the lochan, where the hazel copses were. Gloom Achanna half hoped, half feared the approach of Katreen. It would be sweet to see her again, sweet to slay her lover before her eyes, brother to him though he was. But, there was the chance that she might descry him, and, whether recognisingly or not, warn the swimmer.

So it was that he had come there before sundown, and now lay crouched among the bracken underneath a projecting mossy ledge close upon the water, where it could scarce be that she or any should see him.

As the gloaming deepened, a great stillness reigned. There was no breath of wind. A scarce audible sigh prevailed among the spires of the heather. The churring of a night-jar throbbled through the darkness. Somewhere a

Green Branches

corncrake called its monotonous *crék-craik*: the dull harsh sound emphasising the utter stillness. The pinging of the gnats hovering over and among the sedges made an incessant rumour through the warm, sultry air.

There was a splash once as of a fish. Then, silence. Then a lower but more continuous splash, or rather wash of water. A slow *susurrus* rustled through the dark.

Where he lay among the fern Gloom Achanna slowly raised his head, stared through the shadows, and listened intently. If Katreen were waiting there she was not near.

Noiselessly he slid into the water. When he rose it was under a clump of green branches. These he had cut and secured three hours before. With his left hand he swam slowly, or kept his equipoise in the water; with his right he guided the heavy rowan-bough. In his mouth were two objects, one long and thin and dark, the other with an occasional glitter as of a dead fish.

His motion was scarce perceptible. None the less he was nigh the middle of the loch almost as soon as another clump of green branches. Doubtless the swimmer beneath it was confident that he was now safe from observation.

The two clumps of green branches drew

Green Branches

nearer. The smaller seemed a mere stray, a spray blown down by the recent gale. But all at once the larger clump jerked awkwardly and stopped. Simultaneously a strange, low strain of music came from the other.

The strain ceased. The two clumps of green branches remained motionless. Slowly, at last, the larger moved forward. It was too dark for the swimmer to see if any one lay hid behind the smaller. When he reached it he thrust aside the leaves.

It was as though a great salmon leaped. There was a splash, and a narrow, dark body shot through the gloom. At the end of it something gleamed. Then suddenly there was a savage struggle. The inanimate green branches tore this way and that, and surged and swirled. Gasping cries came from the leaves. Again and again the gleaming thing leapt. At the third leap an awful scream shrilled through the silence. The echo of it wailed thrice, with horrible distinctness, in the corrie beyond Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. Then, after a faint splashing, there was silence once more. One clump of green branches drifted slowly up the lochlet. The other moved steadily towards the place whence, a brief while before, it had stirred.

Only one thing lived in the heart of Gloom

Green Branches

Achanna—the joy of his exultation. He had killed his brother Seumas. He had always hated him because of his beauty; of late he had hated him because he had stood between him, Gloom, and Katreen Macarthur—because he had become her lover. They were all dead now, except himself, all the Achannas. He was “Achanna.” When the day came that he would go back to Galloway, there would be a magpie on the first birk, and a screaming jay on the first rowan, and a croaking raven on the first fir; ay, he would be their suffering, though they knew nothing of him meanwhile! He would be Achanna of Achanna again. Let those who would stand in his way beware. As for Katreen: perhaps he would take her there, perhaps not. He smiled.

These thoughts were the wandering fires in his brain while he slowly swam shoreward under the floating green branches, and as he disengaged himself from them, and crawled upward through the bracken. It was at this moment that a third man entered the water, from the farther shore.

Prepared as he was to come suddenly upon Katreen, Gloom was startled when, in a place of dense shadow, a hand touched his shoulder, and her voice whispered “*Seumas, Seumas!*”

Green Branches

The next moment she was in his arms. He could feel her heart beating against his side.

“What was it, Seumas? What was that awful cry?” she whispered.

For answer, he put his lips to hers, and kissed her again and again.

The girl drew back. Some vague instinct warned her.

“What is it, Seumas? Why don’t you speak?”

He drew her close again.

“Pulse of my heart, it is I who love you, I who love you best of all; it is I, Gloom Achanna!”

With a cry, she struck him full in the face. He staggered, and in that moment she freed herself.

“You *coward!*”

“Katreen, I——”

“Come no nearer. If you do, it will be the death of you!”

“The death o’ me! Ah, bonnie fool that you are, and is it you that will be the death o’ me?”

“Ay, Gloom Achanna, for I have but to scream and Seumas will be here, and he would kill you like a dog if he knew you did me harm.”

Green Branches

“ Ah, but if there were no Seumas, or any man to come between me an’ my will! ”

“ Then there would be a woman! Ay, if you overbore me I would strangle you with my hair, or fix my teeth in your false throat! ”

“ I was not for knowing you were such a wild-cat: but I’ll tame you yet, my lass! Aha, wild-cat! ” and as he spoke he laughed low.

“ It is a true word, Gloom of the black heart. I *am* a wild-cat, and like a wild-cat I am not to be seized by a fox; and that you will be finding to your cost, by the holy St. Brigit! But now, off with you, brother of my man! ”

“ Your man—ha! ha!——”

“ Why do you laugh? ”

“ Sure, I am laughing at a warm, white lass like yourself having a dead man as your lover! ”

“ A—dead—man? ”

No answer came. The girl shook with a new fear. Slowly she drew closer, till her breath fell warm against the face of the other. He spoke at last.

“ Ay, a dead man. ”

“ It is a lie. ”

“ Where would you be that you were not hearing his good-bye? I’m thinking it was loud enough! ”

Green Branches

“It is a lie—it is a lie!”

“No, it is no lie. Seumas is cold enough now. He’s low among the weeds by now. Ay, by now: down there in the lochan.”

“*What*—you, *you* devil! Is it for killing your own brother you would be?”

“I killed no one. He died his own way. Maybe the cramp took him. Maybe—maybe a kelpie gripped him. I watched. I saw him beneath the green branches. He was dead before he died. I saw it in the white face o’ him. Then he sank. He’s dead. Seumas is dead. Look here, girl, I’ve always loved you. I swore the oath upon you. You’re mine. Sure, you’re mine now, Katreen! It is loving you I am! It will be a south wind for you from this day, *muirnean mochree!* See here, I’ll show you how I——”

“Back—back—*murderer!*”

“Be stopping that foolishness now, Katreen Macarthur! By the Book I am tired of it. I am loving you, and it’s having you for mine I am! And if you won’t come to me like the dove to its mate, I’ll come to you like the hawk to the dove!”

With a spring he was upon her. In vain she strove to beat him back. His arms held her as a stoat grips a rabbit.

He pulled her head back, and kissed her

throat till the strangulating breath sobbed against his ear. With a last despairing effort she screamed the name of the dead man: "*Seumas! Seumas! Seumas!*" The man who struggled with her laughed.

"Ay, call away! The herrin' will be coming through the bracken as soon as Seumas comes to your call! Ah, it is mine you are now, Katreen! He's dead an' cold—an' you'd best have a living man—an'——"

She fell back, her balance lost in the sudden releasing. What did it mean? Gloom still stood there, but as one frozen. Through the darkness she saw, at last, that a hand gripped his shoulder; behind him a black mass vaguely obtruded.

For some moments there was absolute silence. Then a hoarse voice came out of the dark.

"You will be knowing now who it is, Gloom Achanna!"

The voice was that of Seumas, who lay dead in the lochan. The murderer shook as in a palsy. With a great effort, slowly he turned his head. He saw a white splatch, the face of the corpse; in this white splatch flamed two burning eyes, the eyes of the soul of the brother whom he had slain.

He reeled, staggered as a blind man, and,

Green Branches

free now of that awful clasp, swayed to and fro as one drunken.

Slowly, Seumas raised an arm and pointed downward through the wood towards the lochan. Still pointing, he moved swiftly forward.

With a cry like a beast, Gloom Achanna swung to one side, stumbled, rose, and leaped into the darkness.

For some minutes Seumas and Katreen stood, silent, apart, listening to the crashing sound of his flight—the race of the murderer against the pursuing shadow of the Grave.

CHILDREN OF THE DARK STAR

It is God that builds the nest of the blind bird. I know not when or where I heard that said, if ever I heard it, but it has been near me as a breast-feather to a bird's heart since I was a child.

When I ponder it, I say to myself that it is God also who guides sunrise and moonrise into obscure hearts, to build, with those winged spirits of light, a nest for the blind soul.

Often and often I have thought of this saying of late, because of him who was known to me years ago as Alasdair Achanna, and of whom I have written elsewhere as "The Anointed Man": though now from the Torridons of Ross to the Rhinns of Islay he is known by one name only, "Alan Dall."

No one knows the end of those who are born under the Dark Star. It is said they are born to some strange, and certainly obscure, destiny. Some are fëy from their youth, or a melancholy of madness comes upon them later, so that they go forth from their kind,

Children of the Dark Star

and wander outcast, haunting most the lonely and desolate regions where the voice of the hill-wind is the sole voice. Some, born to evil, become, in strange ways, ministers of light. Some, born of beauty, are plumed spirits of decay. But of one and all this is sure: that, in the end, none knows the when or how of their going.

Of these Children of the Dark Star my friend Alasdair Achanna, "Alan Dall," was one.

"Alan Dall"—blind, as the Gaelic word means: it was difficult for me to believe that darkness could be fallen, without break, upon the eyes of Alasdair Achanna. He had so loved the beauty of the world that he had forfeited all else. Yet, blind wayfarer along the levens of life as he was, I envied him—for, truly, this beautiful soul had entered into the kingdom of dreams.

When accidentally I met him once again, it was with deep surprise on both sides. He thought I had gone to a foreign land, either the English southlands or "away beyond." I, for my part, had believed him to be no longer of the living, and had more than once wondered if he had been lured away, as the saying is.

We spoke much of desolate Eilanmore, and

Children of the Dark Star

wondered if the rains and winds still made the same gloom upon the isle as when we lived there. We spoke of his kinswoman, and my dear friend, Anne Gillespie, she who went away with Mànus MacCodrum, and died so young; and of Mànus himself and his terrible end, when Gloom his brother played death upon him, in the deep sea, where the seals were, and he hearing nothing, nothing in all the world, but the terror and horror of the Dàn-nan-Ròn. And we spoke of Gloom himself, of whom none had heard since the day he fled from the west—not after the death of Mànus, about which few knew, but after the murder of the swimmer in the loch, whom he took to be his own brother Seumas and the lover of his desire, Katreen Macarthur. I thought—perhaps it was rather I preferred to think—that Gloom was no longer among the evil forces loose in the world; but I heard from Alasdair that he was alive, and would some day come again; for the men who are without compassion, and sin because it is their life, cannot for too long remain from the place of their evil-doing.

Since then I have had reason to know how true was Alasdair's spiritual knowledge—though this is not the time for me to relate either what I then heard from "Alan Dall,"

Children of the Dark Star

or what terrible and strange revealing of Gloom Achanna there was some three years ago, when his brother, whom he was of old so wont to mock, was no longer among those who dwell visibly on earth.

But naturally that which the more held me in interest was the telling by Alasdair of how he whom I had thought dead was alive, and known by another name than his own. It is a story I will tell again, that of "Alan Dall": of how his blindness came to him, and of how he quickened with the vision that is from within, and of divers strange things; but here I speak only of that which brought him to Love and Death and the Gate of Dreams.

For many weeks and months after he left Eilanmore, he told me, he wandered aimlessly abroad among the Western Isles. The melancholy of his youth had become a madness, but this was only the air that blew continually upon the loneliness of his spirit. There was a star upon his forehead, I know, for I have seen it: I saw it long ago when he revealed to me that beauty was a haunting spirit everywhere: when I looked upon him, and knew him as one anointed. In the light of that star he walked ever in a divine surety. It was the star of beauty.

He fared to and fro as one in a dream, a

Children of the Dark Star

dream behind, a dream his quest, himself a dream. Wherever he went, the light that was his spirit shone for healing, for peace, for troubled joy. He had ever lived so solitary, so few save his own kin and a scattered folk among the inner isles knew him even by sight, that in all the long reach of the Hebrides from the Butt of the Lews to Barra Head he passed as a stranger—a Gael and an islesman, it is true, because of his tongue and accent, but still a stranger. So great was the likeness he bore to one who was known throughout the Hebrides, and in particular to every man and woman in the South Isles, so striking in everything save height was he to the priest, Father Alan M'Ian, known everywhere simply as Father Alan, that he in turn came to be called Alan Mòr.

He was in Benbecula, the isle of a thousand waters, when he met his brother Gloom, and this on the day or the next day but one following the wild end of Mánus MacCodrum. His brother, dark, slim, furtive as an otter, was moving swiftly through a place of heather-clumps and brown tangled fern. Alasdair was on the ground, and saw him as he came. There was a smile on his face that he knew was evil, for Gloom so smiled when his spirit rose within him.

Children of the Dark Star

He stopped abruptly, a brief way off. He had not descried any other, but a yellowhammer had swung sidelong from a spire of furze, uttering a single note. Somewhere, he thought, death was on the trail of life.

There was motionless stillness for a brief while. The yellowhammer hopped to the topmost spray of the bramblebush where he had alit, and his light song flirted through the air.

Then Gloom spoke. He looked sidelong, smiling furtively; yet his eyes had not rested on his brother.

“Well, now, Alasdair, soon there will not be an Achanna on Eilanmore.”

Alasdair—tall, gaunt, with his blue dreaming eyes underneath his grizzled tangled hair—rose, and put out his right hand in greeting; but Gloom looked beyond it. Alasdair broke the silence which ensued.

“So you are here in Benbecula, brother? I, and others too, thought you had gone across the seas when you left Eilanmore.”

“The nest was fouled, I am thinking, brother, or you, and Mànus too, and then I myself, would not be here and be there.”

“Are you come out of the south, or going there?”

Children of the Dark Star

“ Well, and for why that? ”

“ I thought you might be having news for me of M̀anus. You know that Anne, who was dear to us, is under the grass now? ”

“ Ay, she is dead. I know that. ”

“ And M̀anus? Is he still at Balnahunnur-sa-mona? Is he the man he was? ”

“ No, I am not for thinking, brother, that M̀anus is the man he was. ”

“ He will be at the fishing now? I heard that more than a mile o' the sea foamed yesterday off Craiginnish Heads, with the big school of mackerel there was. ”

“ Ay, he was ever fond o' the sea, M̀anus MacCodrum: fëy o' the sea, for the matter o' that, Alasdair Achanna. ”

“ I am on my way now to see M̀anus. ”

“ I would not be going, brother, ” answered Gloom, in a slow, indifferent voice.

“ And for why that? ”

Gloom advanced idly, and slid to the ground, lying there and looking up into the sky.

“ It's a fair, sweet world, Alasdair. ”

Alasdair looked at him, but said nothing.

“ It's a fair, sweet world. I have heard that saying on your mouth a score of times, and a score upon a score. ”

“ Well? ”

Children of the Dark Star

“ Well? But is it not a fair, sweet world? ”

“ Ay, it is fair and sweet.”

“ Lie still, brother, and I will tell you about Mànus, who married Anne whom I loved. And I will be beginning, if you please, with the night when she told us that he was to be her man, and when I played on my *feadan* the air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn. Will you be remembering that? ”

“ I remember.”

Then, with that, Gloom, always lying idly on his back, and smiling often as he stared into the blue sky, told all that happened to Anne and Mànus, till death came to Anne; and then how Mànus heard the seal-voice that was in his blood calling to him; and how he went to his sea-folk, made mad by the secret fatal song of the *feadan*, the song that is called the Dàn-nan-Ròn; and how the pools in the rocky skerries out yonder in the sea were red still with the blood that the seals had not lapped, or that the tide had not yet lifted and spilled greying into the grey wave.

There was a silence when he had told that thing. Alasdair did not look at him. Gloom, still lying on his back, stared into the sky, smiling furtively. Alasdair was white as foam at night. At last he spoke.

Children of the Dark Star

“The death of Mánus is knocking at your heart, Gloom Achanna.”

“I am not a seal, brother. Ask the seals. They know. He was of their people: not of us.”

“It is a lie. He was a man, as we are. He was our friend, and the husband of Anne. His death is knocking at your heart, Gloom Achanna.”

“Are you for knowing if our brother Seumas is still on Eilanmore?”

Alasdair looked long at him, anxious, puzzled by the abrupt change.

“And for why should he not still be on Eilanmore?”

“Have you not had hearing of anything about Seumas—and—and—about Katreena nic Airt——”

“About Katreen, daughter of Art Macarthur, in the Sleat of Skye?”

“Ay—about Seumas, and Katreen Macarthur?”

“What about them?”

“Nothing. Ah, no, for sure, nothing. But did you never hear Seumas speak of this bonnie Katreen?”

“He has the deep love for her, Gloom; the deep, true love.”

“H’m!”

Children of the Dark Star

With that Gloom smiled again, as he stared idly into the sky from where he lay on his back amid the heather and bracken. With a swift, furtive gesture he slipped his feadan from his breast, and put his breath upon it. A cool, high spiral of sound, like delicate blue smoke, ascended.

Then, suddenly, he began to play the *Dannhsa-na-Mairbh*—the Dance of Death.

Alasdair shivered, but said nothing. He had his eyes on the ground. When the wild, fantastic, terrifying air filled the very spires of the heather with its dark music—its music out of the grave—he looked at his brother.

“Will you be telling me now, Gloom, what is in your heart against Seumas?”

“Is not Seumas wishful to be leaving Eilanmore?”

“Like enough. I know nothing of Eilanmore now. It is long since I have seen the white o’ the waves in Catacol haven.”

“I am thinking that that air I was playing will help him to be leaving soon, but not to be going where Katreen Macarthur is.”

“And why not?”

“Well, because I am thinking Katreen, the daughter of Art Macarthur, is to have another man to master her than our brother Seumas.

Children of the Dark Star

I will tell you his name, Alasdair: it is Gloom Achanna."

"It is a cruel wrong that is in your mind. You would do to Seumas what you have done to Mànus, husband of Anne, our friend and kinswoman. There is death in your heart, Gloom: the blue mould is on the corn that is your heart."

Gloom played softly. It was a little eddy of evil bitter music, swift and biting and poisonous as an adder's tongue.

Alasdair's lips tightened, and a red splash came into the whiteness of his face, as though a snared bird were bleeding beneath a patch of snow.

"You have no love for the girl. By your own word to me on Eilanmore, you had the hunger on you for Anne Gillespie. Was that just because you saw that she loved Mànus? And is it so now—that you have a hawk's eye for the poor birdeen yonder in the Sleat, and that just because you know, or have heard, that Seumas loves her, and loves her true, and because she loves him?"

"I have heard no such lie, Alasdair Achanna."

"Then what is it that you have heard?"

"Oh, the east wind whispers in the grass; an' a bird swims up from the grass an' sings

it in the blue fields up yonder; an' then it falls down again in a thin, thin rain; an' a drop trickles into my ear. An' that is how I am knowing that what I know, Alasdair Achanna."

"And Anne—did you love Anne?"

"Anne is dead."

"It's the herring-love that is yours, Gloom. To-day it is a shadow here: to-morrow it is a shadow yonder. There is no tide for you: there is no haven for the likes o' you."

"There is one woman I want. It is Katreen Macarthur."

"If it be a true thing that I have heard, Gloom Achanna, you have brought shame and sorrow to one woman already."

For the first time Gloom stirred. He shot a swift glance at Alasdair, and a tremor was in his white, sensitive hands. He looked as a startled fox does, when, intent, its muscles quiver before flight.

"And what will you have heard?" he asked in a low voice.

"That you took away from her home a girl who did not love you, but on whom you put a spell; and that she followed you to her sorrow, and was held by you to her shame; and that she was lost, or drowned herself at last, because of these things."

Children of the Dark Star

“And did you hear who she was?”

“No. The man who told me was Aulay MacAulay, of Carndhu in Sutherland. He said he did not know who she was, but I am thinking he did know, poor man, because his eyes wavered, and he put a fluttering hand to his beard and began to say swift, stammering words about the herrin' that had been seen off the headland that morning.

Gloom smiled, a faint fugitive smile; then, half turning where he lay, he took a letter from his pocket.

“Ay, for sure, Aulay MacAulay was an old friend of yours; to be sure, yes. I am remembering he used sometimes to come to Eilanmore in his smack. But before I speak again of what you said to me just now, I will read you my letter that I have written to our brother Seumas; he is not knowing if I am living still, or am dead.”

With that he opened the letter, and, smiling momentarily at times, he read it in a slow, deliberate voice, and as though it were the letter of another man:

Well, Seumas, my brother, it is wondering if I am dead you will be. Maybe ay, and maybe no. But I send you this writing to let you see that I know all you do and think of. So you are going to leave Eilanmore without an Achanna upon it? And you

Children of the Dark Star

will be going to Sleat in Skye? Well, let me be telling you this thing: *Do not go*. I see blood there. And there is this, too: neither you nor any man shall take Katreen away from me. *You* know that; and Ian Macarthur knows it; and Katreen knows it: and that holds whether I am alive or dead. I say to you: *Do not go*. It will be better for you and for all. Ian Macarthur is away on the north-sea with the whaler-captain who came to us at Eilanmore, and will not be back for three months yet. It will be better for him not to come back. But if he comes back he will have to reckon with the man who says that Katreen Macarthur is his. I would rather not have two men to speak to, and one my brother. It does not matter to you where I am. I want no money just now. But put aside my portion for me. Have it ready for me against the day I call for it. I will not be patient that day: so have it ready for me. In the place that I am, I am content. You will be saying: Why is my brother away in a remote place (I will say this to you: That it is not further north than St. Kilda nor further south than the Mull of Cantyre!), and for what reason? That is between me and silence. But perhaps you think of Anne sometimes. Do you know that she lies under the green grass? And of Mánus MacCodrum? They say that he swam out into the sea and was drowned; and they whisper of the seal-blood, though the minister is angered with them for that. He calls it a madness. Well, I was there at that madness, and I played to it on my feadan. And now, Seumas, can you be thinking of what the tune was that I played?

Your brother, who waits his own day.

GLOOM.

Children of the Dark Star

"Do not be forgetting this thing: *I would rather not be playing the Dannhsa-na-Mairbh.* It was an ill hour for Mànus when he heard the Dàn-nan-Ron; it was the song of his soul, that; and yours is the Dannhsa-na-Mairbh."

When he had read the last words, Gloom looked at Alasdair. His eyes quailed instinctively at the steadfast gaze of his brother.

"I am thinking," he said lightly, though uneasily as he himself knew, "that Seumas will not now be putting his marriage-thoughts upon Katreen."

For a minute or more Alasdair was silent. Then he spoke.

"Do you remember, when you were a child, what old Morag said?"

"No."

"She said that your soul was born black, and that you were no child for all your young years; and that for all your pleasant ways, for all your smooth way and smoother tongue, you would do cruel evil to man and woman as long as you lived. She said you were born under the Dark Star."

Gloom laughed.

"Ay, and you too, Alasdair. Don't be forgetting that. You too, she saw, were born so. She said we—you and I—that we two were the Children of the Dark Star."

Children of the Dark Star

“But she said no evil of me, Gloom, and you are knowing that well.”

“Well, and what then?”

“Do not send that letter to Seumas. He has deep love for Katreen. Let the lass be. You do not love her, Gloom. It will be to her sorrow and shame if you seek her. But if you are still for sending it, I will sail to-morrow for Eilanmore. I will tell Seumas, and I will go with him to the Sleat of Skye. And I will be there to guard the girl Katreen against you, Gloom.”

“No: you will do none of these things, And for why? Because to-morrow you will be hurrying far north to Stornoway. And when you are at Stornoway you may still be Alan Mòr to every one, as you are here, but to one person you will be Alasdair Achan-na, and no other, and now and for evermore.”

Alasdair stared, amazed.

“What wild-goose folly is this that you would be setting me on, you whom it is my sorrow to call brother?”

“I have a letter here for you to read. I wrote it many days ago, but it is a good letter now for all that. If I give it to you now, will you pass me the word that you will not read it till I am gone away from here—till you

cannot have a sight of me, or of the shadow of my shadow?"

"I promise."

"Then here it is: an' good day to you, Alasdair Achanna. An' if ever we meet again, you be keeping to your way, as I will keep to my way: and in that doing there shall be no blood between brothers. But if you want to seek me, you will find me across the seas, and mayhap Katreen—ah, well, yes, Katreen or some one else—by my side."

And with that, and giving no hand, or no glance of the eyes, Gloom rose, and turned upon his heel, and walked slowly but lightly across the tangled bent.

Alasdair watched him till he was a long way off. Gloom never once looked back. When he was gone a hundred yards or more, he put his feadan to his mouth and began to play. Two airs he played, the one ever running into the other: wild, fantastic, and, in Alasdair's ears, horrible to listen to. In the one he heard the moaning of Anne, the screams of Mànus among the seals: in the other, a terror moving stealthily against his brother Seumas, and against Katreen, and—and—he knew not whom.

When the last faint wild spiral of sound, that seemed to be neither of the Dàn-nan-Ròn nor

of the Danthsa-na-Mairbh, but of the soul of evil that inhabited both—when this last perishing echo was no more, and only the clean cold hill-wind came down across the moors with a sighing sweetness, Alasdair rose. The letter could wait now, he muttered, till he was before the peats.

When he returned to the place where he was lodging, the crofter's wife put a bowl of porridge and some coarse rye-bread before him.

“And when you've eaten, Alan Mòr,” she said, as she put her plaid over her head and shoulders, and stood in the doorway, “will you be having the goodness to smoor the peats before you lie down for the sleep that I'm thinking is heavy upon you?”

“Ay, for sure,” Alasdair answered gently. “But are you not to be here to-night?”

“No. The sister of my man Ranald is down with the fever, and her man away with mine at the fishing, and I am going to be with her this night; but I will be here before you wake for all that. And so good-night again, Alan Mòr.”

“God's blessing, and a quiet night, good woman.”

Then, after he had supped, and dreamed a while as he sat opposite the fire of glowing

Children of the Dark Star

peats, he opened the letter that Gloom had given him. He read it slowly.

It was some minutes later that he took it up again, from where it had fallen on the red sandstone of the hearth. And now he read it once more, aloud, and in a low, strained voice that had a bitter, frozen grief in it—a frozen grief that knew no thaw in tears, in a single sob.

You will remember well, Alasdair my brother, that you loved Marsail nic Ailpean, who lived in Eilan-Rona. You will be remembering, too, that when Ailpean MacAilpean said he would never let Marsail put her hand in yours, you went away and said no more. That was because you were a fool, Alasdair my brother. And Marsail—she, too, thought you were a fool. I know you did that doing because you thought it was Marsail's wish: that is, because she did not love you. What had that to do with it? I am asking you, what had that to do with it, if you wanted Marsail? Women are for men, not men for women. And, brother, because you are a poet, let me tell you this, which is old ancient wisdom, and not mine alone, that no woman likely to be loved by a poet can be true to a poet. For women are all at heart cowards, and it takes a finer woman than any you or I have known to love a poet. For that means to take the steep brae instead of the easy lily leven. I am thinking, Alasdair, you will not find easily the woman that in her heart of hearts will leave the lily leven for the steep brae. No, not easily.

Children of the Dark Star

Ah yes, for sure, I am hearing you say—women bear pain better, are braver, too, than men. I have heard you say that. I have heard the whistle-fish at the coming of the tide—but a little later the tide came nearer. And are they brave, these women you who are poets speak of, but whom we who are men never meet! I will tell you this little thing, brother: they are always crying for love, but love is the one thing they fear. And in their hearts they hate poets, Alasdair, because poets say, *Be true*: but that cannot be, because women can be true to their lovers, but they cannot be true to love—for love wishes sunrise and full noon everywhere, so that there be no lie anywhere, and that is why women fear love.

And I am thinking of these things, because of Marsail whom you loved, and because of the song you made once about the bravery of woman. I have forgotten the song, but I remember that the last line of that song was 'foam o' the sea.'

And what is all this about? you will be saying when you read this. Well, for that, it is my way. If you want a woman—not that a man like you, all visions and bloodless as a skate, could ever have that want—you would go to her and say so. But my way is to play my feadan at the towers of that woman's pride and self-will, and see them crumbling, crumbling, till I walk in when I will, and play my feadan again, and go laughing out once more, and she with me.

But again you will say, Why all this? Brother, will you be remembering this: That our brother Marcus also loved Marsail. Marcus is under the wave, you will say. Yes, Marcus is under the wave. But I, Gloom Achanna, am not: and I too loved Marsail. Well, when you went away, you wrote a

Children of the Dark Star

letter to her to say that you would never love any other woman. She did not get that letter. It is under the old black stone with the carvings on it, that is in the brown water of the bog that lies between Eilanmore farmhouse and the Grey Loch. And once, long afterward, you wrote again, and you sent that letter to Marcus, to take to her and to give to her in person. I found it on the day of his death in the pocket of a frieze coat he had worn the day before. I do not know where it is now. The gulls know. Or perhaps the crabs at the bottom of the sea do. *You with your writing, brother: I with my feadan.*

Well, I went to Eilan-Rona. I played my feadan there, outside the white walls of Marsail nic Ailpean. And when the walls were crumbling I entered, and I said Come, and she came.

No, no, Alasdair my brother, I do not think you would have been happy. She was ever letting tears come in the twilight, and in the darkness of the sleeping hours. I have heard her sob in full noon, brother. She was fair to see, a comely lass; but she never took to a vagrant life. She thought we were going to Coleraine to sail to America. America is a long way—it is a longer way than love for a woman who has too many tears. She said I had put a spell upon her. Tut, tut. I played my feadan to pretty Marsail. No harm in that, for sure, Alasdair aghrày?

For six months or more we wandered here and there. She had no English—so, to quiet her with silence, I went round by the cold bleak burghs and grey stony towns northward and eastward of Inverness, as far and further than Peterhead and Fraserburgh. A cold land, a thin, bloodless folk. I would not be recommending it to you, Alasdair. And yet,

Children of the Dark Star

for why not? It would be a good place for the 'Anointed Man.' You could be practising there nicely, brother, against cold winds and cold hearths and bitter cold ways.

This is a long, long letter, the longest I have ever written. It has been for pleasure to me to write this letter, though I have written slowly, and now here, and now there. And I must be ending. But I will say this first: That I am weary of Marsail now, and that, too, for weeks past. She will be having a child soon. She is in Stornoway, at the house of Bean Marsanta MacIlleathain ('Widow M'Lean,' as they have it in that half-English place), in the street that runs behind the big street where the Courthouse is. She will be there till her time is over. It is a poor place, ill-smelling, too. But she will do well there: Bean Catreena is a good woman, if she is paid for it. And I paid good money, Alasdair. It will do for a time. Not for very long, I am thinking, but till then. Marsail has no longer her fair-to-see way with her. It is a pity that—for Marsail.

And now, brother, will you be remembering your last word to me on Eilanmore? You said, 'You shall yet eat dust, Gloom Achanna, whose way is the way of death.' And will you be remembering what I said? I said, 'Wait, for I may come later than you to that bitter eating.'

And now I am thinking that it is you, and not I, who have eaten dust.—Your brother,

GLOOM.

And so—his dream was over. The vision of a happiness to be, of a possible happiness—and, for long, it had not been with Alasdair

Children of the Dark Star

a vision of reward to him, but one of a rarer happiness, which considered only the weal of Marsail, and that whether ultimately he or some other won her—this, which was, now was not: this was become as the dew on last year's grass. Not once had he wavered in his dream. By day and by night the wild-rose of his love had given him beauty and fragrance. He had come to hope little: indeed, to believe that Marsail might already be wed happily, and perhaps with a child's little hands against her breast. I am thinking he did not love as most men love.

When the truth flamed into his heart from the burning ashes of Gloom's letter, he sat a while, staring vaguely into the glow of the peats. There had been a bitter foolishness in his making, he muttered to himself: a bitter foolishness. Had he been more as other men and less a dreamer, had he shown less desire of the soul and more desire of the body, then surely Marsail would not have been so hard to win. For she had lingered with him in the valley, if she had not trod the higher slopes: that he remembered with mingled joy and grief. Surely she had loved him. And, of a truth, his wrought imaginings were not rainbow-birds. Their wings had caught the spray of those bitter waters which we call experi-

Children of the Dark Star

ence, the wisdom of the flesh. Great love claims the eternal stars behind the perishing stars of the beloved's eyes, and would tread "the vast of dreams" beneath a little human heart. But there are few who love thus. It was not likely that Marsail was of those strong enough to mate with the great love. The many love too well the near securities.

All night long Alasdair sat brooding by the fire. Before dawn, he rose and went to the door. The hollow infinitude of the sky was filled with the incense of a myriad smoke of stars. His gaze wandered, till held where Hesperus and the planets called The Hounds leaped, tremulously incessant, forever welling to the brim, yet never spilling their radiant liquid fires. An appalling stillness prevailed in these depths.

Beyond the heather-slope in the moor he could hear the sea grinding the shingle as the long, slow wave rose and fell. Once, for a few moments, he listened intent: invisibly overhead a tail of wild geese travelled wedge-wise towards polar seas, and their forlorn honk slipped bell-like through the darkness, and as from ledge to ledge of silent air.

As though it were the dew of that silence, peace descended upon him. There was, in truth, a love deeper than that of the

Children of the Dark Star

body. Marsail—ah, poor broken heart, poor wounded life! Was love not great enough to heal that wound; was there not balm to put a whiteness and a quietness over that troubled heart, deep calm and moonrise over drowning waters?

Mayhap she did not love him now, could never love him as he loved her, with the love that is blind to life and deaf to death: well, her he loved. It was enough. Her sorrow and her shame, at least, might be his too. Her will would be his will: and if she were too weary to will, her weariness would be his to guide into a haven of rest: and if she had no thought of rest, no dream of rest, no wish for rest, but only a blind, baffled crying for the love which had brought her to the dust, well, that too he would take as his own, and comfort her with a sweet, impossible dream, and crown her shame with honour, and put his love like cool green grass beneath her feet.

“And she will not lose all,” he said, smiling gently: adding, below his breath, as he turned to make ready for his departure against the dawn, “because, for sure, it is God that builds the nest of the blind bird.”

ALASDAIR THE PROUD¹

“There were crowns lying there, idle gold in the yellow sand, and no man heeded them. Why should any man heed them? And where the long grass waved, there were women’s breasts, so still in the brown silence, that the fluttering moths, which shake with the breaths of daisies, motionlessly poised their wings above where so many sighs once were, and where no more was any pulse of joy.”

“And what was the name of the man who led the spears on that day?”

“He had the name that you have—Alasdair; Alasdair the Proud.”

“What was the cause of that red trail and of the battle among the hills?”

Gloom Achanna smiled, that swift, furtive smile which won so many, and in the end men and women cursed.

“It was a dream,” he said slowly.

“A dream?”

¹ The opening sentence is from the tale “Enya of the Dark Eyes,” in *The Dominion of Dreams*.

Alasdair the Proud

“Yes. Her name was Enya—Enya of the Dark Eyes.”

Alasdair M'Ian's grey-blue eyes wandered listlessly from the man who lay beside him in the heather. Enya of the Dark Eyes! The name was like a moonbeam in his mind.

Gloom Achanna watched him, though he kept his gaze upon the dry, crackled sprays of the heather, and was himself, seemingly, idly adrift in the swimming thought that is as the uncertain wind.

How tall and strong his companion was! he meditated. Had he forgotten, Gloom wondered: had he forgotten that day, years and years ago, when he had thrust him, Gloom Achanna, aside, and had then with laughing scorn lifted him suddenly and thrown him into the Pool of Diarmid? That was in Skye, in the Sleat of Skye. It was many years ago. That did not matter, though. There are no years to remembrance; what was, either is or is not.

And now they had met again by the roadside; and if not in Skye, not far from it, for they were now in Tiree, the low surf-girt island that for miles upon miles swims like a green snake between the Southern Minch and the Hebrid seas. It was a chance meeting too, if there is any chance; and after so many

years. Gloom Achanna smiled; a sudden swift shadow it was that crossed his face, smooth, comely, pale beneath his sleek, seal-like dark hair. No, it was not chance this, he whispered to himself; no, for sure, it was not chance. When he looked suddenly at 'Alasdair M'Ian, with furtive, forgetting eyes, he did not smile again, but the dusky pupils expanded and contracted.

And so, his thought ran, 'Alasdair M'Ian was a great man in that little world over yonder, the world of the towns and big cities! He had made a name for himself by his books, his poems, and the strange music wherewith he clothed his words, whether in song or story.

H'm; for that, did not he, Gloom, know many a *dàn*, many a wild *òran*; could he not tell many a *sgeul* as fine, or finer? Ay, by the Black Stone of Iona! Why, then, should this Englishman have so much fame? Well, well, if not English, he wrote and spoke and thought in that foreign tongue, and had forgotten the old speech, or had no ease with it, and no doubt was Sasunnach to the core.

But for all his fame, and though he was still young and strong and fair to see, had he forgotten? He, Gloom Achanna, did not ever forget.

Alasdair the Proud

Indeed, indeed, there was no chance in that meeting. Why had he, Gloom, gone to Tìree at all? It had been a whim. But now he understood.

And Alasdair M'Ian—Alasdair the Proud? What was *he* there for? There were no idle silly folk on the long isle of Tìree to listen to English songs. Ah yes, indeed; of course he was there. Where would he be coming to, after these long seven years, but to the place where he had first met and loved Ethlenn Maclaine?

Gloom pondered a while. That was a strange love, that of Alasdair M'Ian, for a woman who was wife to another man, and he loving her and she him. She had been the flame behind all these poems and stories which had made him so famous. For seven years he had loved her, and Alasdair the Proud was not the man to love a woman for seven years unless it was out of the great love, which is as deep as the sea, and as wild and hopeless as the south wind when she climbs against the stars.

Then all that he knew, all that he had heard of fact and half fact and cloudy rumour, all that he surmised, became in Gloom's mind a clear vision. He understood now, and he remembered. Had he not heard but a brief while ago that Alasdair was fëy with

Alasdair the Proud

his love-dream? Did he not know that the man had endured so long, and become what he was, because for all these years he had held Ethlenn's love, because he believed that she loved him as he her? Was it not by this that he lived; that he made beauty with cunning, haunting words? Was it not true that for all her marriage with the good, loving, frail son of Maclaine of Inch, she was in body and mind and soul wife to the man whom, too late, she had met, and who in her had found the bitter infinite way?

Yes; now, in a myriad sudden eddies of remembrance and surmise, he knew the poor tired soul, with its great dreams and imperishable desires, of Alasdair the Proud; and like a hawk his spirit hovered over it, uttering fierce cries of a glad and terrible hate. And of one thing he thought with almost an awe of laughing joy—that, even then, he had upon him the letter which, more than a week before, he had idly taken from Uille Beag, the lad who carried the few letters in that remote place. It was, as he knew, having read it, a letter from Ethlenn to Ronald Maclaine, her husband, who was then in Tiree, and she somewhere in the Southlands, in her and his home. He loved much to play the evil, bitter seduction of his music; that strange playing

Alasdair the Proud

upon his feadan which none heard without disquietude, and mayhap fear and that which is deeper than fear. But he smiled when he thought of that letter; and the unspoken words upon his lips were that he was glad he had now two feadans, though one was only a little sheet of paper.

For two hours they had walked the same road that day, having met by the wayside. Then, having had milk and some oat-bread from a woman who had a little croft, they had rested on the heather, and Gloom Achanna had told old tales, old tales that he knew would fill the mind of Alasdair M'Ian with ancient beauty, and with the beauty that does not perish, for that which was, being perfect, is proudly enduring with other than mortal breath.

In this way he won his companion to forgetfulness.

For a time there had been a dreaming silence. A pyot called loudly; a restless plover wheeled this way and that, crying forlornly. There were no other sounds, save when a wandering air whinnied in the gorse or made a strange, faint whistling among the spires of the heather.

With a stealthy movement, Gloom Achanna drew his feadan from its clasps beneath his

Alasdair the Proud

coat. He put the flute to his mouth and breathed. It was as though birds were flitting to and fro in the moonshine, and pale moths of sound fluttered above drowning pools.

Alasdair did not hear, or made no sign. After a time he closed his eyes. It was sweet to lie there, in the honey-fragrant heather, in that remote isle, there where he had first seen the woman of his love; healing-sweet to be away from the great city in the south, from the deep weariness of his life there, from the weariness of men with whom he had so little in common. He was so fevered with the bitter vanity of his love that life had come to mean nothing else to him but the passing of coloured or discoloured moments. If only he might find peace; that, for long, he had wanted more than joy, whose eyes were too sorrowful now.

Out of that great love and passion he had woven beautiful things—Beauty. That was his solace; by that, in that, for that, he lived.

But now he was tired. Too great a weariness had come upon his spirit. He heard other voices than those of Ethlenn whom he loved. They whispered to him by day, and were the forlorn echoes of his dreams.

For Beauty: yes, he would live for that; for his dream, and the weaving anew of that

Alasdair the Proud

loveliness which made his tired mind wonderful and beautiful as an autumnal glen filled with moonshine. He had strength for this, since he knew that Ethlenn loved him, and loved him with too proud and great a love to be untrue to it even in word or deed, and so far the less in thought. By this he lived.

But now he lay upon the heather, tranced, at rest.

He heard the cold, delicate music float idly above the purple bloom around him. Old foonsheen, enchanted airs: these, later, Gloom 'Achanna played. He smiled when he saw the frown passing from Alasdair's brows, and the lines in the face grow shadowy, and rest dwell beneath the closed eyes.

Then a single, wavering note wandered fitfully across the heather; another, and another. An old, sorrowful air stole through the hush, till the sadness had a cry in it that was as the crying of a lamentation not to be borne. Alasdair stirred, sighing wearily. Below the lashes of his eyes tears gathered. At that, Gloom smiled once more; but in a moment watched again, furtively, with grave, intent gaze.

The air changed, but subtly, as the lift of the wind from grass to swaying foliage. The frown came back into Alasdair's forehead.

Alasdair the Proud

“Achanna,” he said suddenly, raising his head and leaning his chin against his hand, with his elbow deep in the heather; “that was a bitter, cruel letter you sent to your brother, Alasdair, that is now Alan Dall.”

Gloom ceased playing, and quietly blew the damp out of his feadan. Then he looked at it sidelong, and slowly put it away again.

“Yes?” he said at last.

“A bitter, cruel letter, Gloom Achanna!”

“Perhaps you will be having the goodness, Alasdair mac Alasdair, if it is not a weariness to you, to tell me how you came to know of that letter?”

“Your brother Alasdair left it in the house of the woman in Benbecula, when his heart was broken by it, and he went north to the Lews, to find that poor woman he loved, and whom you ruined. And there the good priest, Father Ian Mackellar, found it, and sent it to me, saying, ‘Here is a worse thing than any told in any of your stories.’”

“Well, and what then, Alasdair, who is called Alasdair the Proud?”

“Why am I called that, Achanna?”

“Why? Oh, for why am I called Gloom of the Feadan? Because it is what people see and hear when they see me and hear me. You are proud because you are big and strong; you

Alasdair the Proud

are proud because you have the kiss of Diarmid; you are proud because you have won great love; you are proud because you have made men and women listen to your songs and tales; you are proud because you are Alasdair M'Ian; you are proud because you dream you are beyond the crushing Hand; you are proud because you are (and not knowing that) feeble as water, and fitful as wind, and weak as a woman."

Alasdair frowned. What word he was going to say died unsaid.

"Tell me," he said at last, quietly, "what made you write these words in that letter: 'Brother, because you are a poet, let me tell you this, which is old, ancient wisdom, and not mine alone, that no woman likely to be loved by a poet can be true to a poet?'"

"Why did I write that, Alasdair Mac-Alasdair?"

"Yes."

"If you read that letter, you know why. I said they were cowards, these loving women whom you poets love, for they will give up all save the lies they love, the lies that save them."

"It is a lie. It means nothing, that evil lie of yours."

"It means this. They can be true to their

Alasdair the Proud

lovers, but they cannot be true to love. They love to be loved. They love the love of a poet, for he dreams beauty into them, and they live as other women cannot, for they go clothed in rainbows and moonshine. But . . . what was it that I wrote? They have to choose at last between the steep brae and the easy lily leven; and I am thinking you will not find easily the woman that in her heart of hearts will leave the lily leven for the steep brae. No, not easily."

"What do *you* know of love, Gloom Achanna—you, of whom the good Father Ian wrote to me as the most evil of all God's creatures?"

Gloom smiled across pale lips, with darkening eyes.

"Did he say that? Sure, it was a hard thing to say. I have done harm to no man that did not harm me; and as to women . . . well, well, for sure, women are women."

"It was well that you were named Gloom. You put evil everywhere."

After that there was silence for a time. Once Achanna put his hand to his feadan again, but withdrew it.

"Shall I be telling you now that old tale of Enya of the Dark Eyes?" he said gently at last, and with soft, persuasive eyes.

Alasdair the Proud

Alasdair lay back wearily.
“ Yes, tell me that tale.”

“ Well, as I was saying, there were crowns lying there, idle gold in the yellow sand, and no man heeded them. And where the long grass waved, there were women’s breasts, so still in the brown silence, that the fluttering moths, which shake with the breaths of daisies, motionlessly poised their wings above where so many sighs once were, and where no more was any pulse of joy . . .” And therewith Gloom Achanna told the tale of Enya of the Dark Eyes, and how Aodh (whom he called Alasdair the Proud) loved her overmuch, and in the end lost both kinghood and manhood because of her wanton love that could be the same to him and to Cathba Fleetfoot. And with these words, smiling furtively, he ended the tale—

“ This is the story of Alasdair the Proud, Alasdair the Poet-King, who made deathless beauty out of the beauty and love of Enya of the Dark Eyes, who sang the same song to two men.”

When Gloom had come to that part of his tale where he told of what the captive woman said to the king, Alasdair slowly turned and

Alasdair the Proud

again fixed his gaze on the man who spoke, leaning the while on his elbow as before, with his chin in his hand.

When Achanna finished, neither said any word for a time. Alasdair looked at the man beside him with intent, unwavering gaze. Gloom's eyes were lidded, and he stared into the grass beneath the heather.

"Why did you tell me that tale, Gloom Achanna?"

"Sure, I thought you loved *sgeulan* of the old, ancient days?"

"Why did you tell me that tale?"

Gloom stirred uneasily. But he did not answer, though he lifted his eyes.

"Why did you call the man who loved Enya, Alasdair? It is not a name of that day. And why do you tell me a tale little altered from one that I have already told with my pen?"

"For sure, I forgot that. And you called the man . . .?"

"I called him Aodh, which was his name. It was Aodh the Proud who loved Enya of the Dark Eyes."

"Well, well, the end was the same. It was not a good end, that of . . . Aodh the Proud."

"Why did you tell me that tale?"

Alasdair the Proud

Suddenly Achanna rose. He stood, looking down upon Alasdair. "It is all one," he said slowly: "Aodh and Enya, or Alasdair and Ethlenn."

A deep flush came into Alasdair's face. A splash stained his forehead.

"Ah," he muttered hoarsely: "and will you be telling me, Gloom Achanna, what you have to do with that name that you have spoken?"

"Man, you are but a fool, I am thinking, for all your wisdom. Here is a letter. Read it. It is from Ethlenn Maclaine."

"From Ethlenn Maclaine?"

"Ay, for sure. But not to you: no, nor yet to me; but to Ronald Maclaine her man."

Alasdair rose. He drew proudly back.

"I will not read the letter. The letter is not for me. Gloom smiled.

"Then I will read it to you, Alasdair M'Ian. It is not a long letter. Oh no; but it is to Ronald Maclaine."

Alasdair looked at the man. He said a word in Gaelic that brought a swift darkening into Gloom's eyes. Then, slowly, he moved away.

"A fool is bad; a blind fool is worse," cried Achanna mockingly.

Alasdair stopped and turned.

"I will neither look nor hear," he said.

Alasdair the Proud

“What was not meant for me to see or hear, I will not see or hear.”

“Is there madness upon you that you believe in a woman because she asks you to take her pledged word? Do you not know that a pressed woman always falls back upon the man’s trusting her absolutely? When she will be knowing that, she can have quiet laughter because of all her shadowy vows and smiling coward lies that are worse than spoken lies. She knows, or thinks she knows, he will be blind and deaf as well as dumb. It is a fine thing that for a proud man, Alasdair M’Ian! It is a fine thing, for sure! And he is a wise man, oh yes, he is a wise man, who will put all his happiness in one scale of the balance, and his trust in another. It is easy for the woman . . . oh yes, for sure. It is what I would do if I were a woman, what you would do. I would say to the man who loved me, as you love Ethlenn Maclaine, ‘You must show your love by absolute unquestioning trust.’ That is how women try to put a cloud about a man’s mind. That is how a woman loves to play the game of love. Then, having said that, if I were a woman, I would smile; and then I would go to the other man, and I would be the same with him, and kiss him, and be all tender sweetness to him, and say the

Alasdair the Proud

same things, and trust him to believe all. It is quite easy to say the same things to two men. I have said to you already, Alasdair M'Ian, that a woman like that is not only untrue to the men who love her, but to love. She cannot say in her heart of hearts, 'Love is the one thing.' She will say it, yes: first to one, then to the other; and perhaps both will believe. And to herself (she will be sorry for herself) she will say, 'I love one for this, and the other for that: they do not clash . . .' knowing well, or perhaps persuading herself so, that this is not a subterfuge. It is the subterfuge of a coward, for she dare not live truly; she must needs be for ever making up to the one what she gives or says to the other. And you . . . you are a poet, they say; and have the thing that makes you see deeper and further and surer; and so it must be you, and not Ronald Mac-laine, who will be the one of the two to doubt!" Achanna ceased abruptly, and began laughing.

Alasdair stood still, staring fixedly at him.

"I wish to hear no more," he said at last quietly, though with a strange, thin, shrill voice; "I wish to hear no more. Will you go now? if not, then I will go."

"Wait now, wait now, for sure! Sure, I

Alasdair the Proud

know the letter off by heart. It goes this way, Alasdair mac Alasdair——”

But putting his hands to his ears, Alasdair again turned aside, and made no sound save with his feet as he trod the crackling under-twigs of the heather.

Gloom swiftly followed. Coming upon Alasdair suddenly and unheard, he thrust the letter before his eyes.

Gloom Achanna smiled as he saw the face of Alasdair the Proud flush deeply again, then grow white and hard, and strangely drawn.

As he did not speak, he muttered against his ears: “*And this is the story of Aodh the Proud, who made deathless beauty out of the beauty and love of Enya of the Dark Eyes, who sang the same song to two men.*”

Still silence.

In a whisper he repeated: “Who . . . sang . . . the same song . . . to . . . two . . . men.”

A change had come over Alasdair. He was quiet, but his fingers restlessly intertwined. His face twitched. His eyes were strained.

“That is a lie . . . a forgery . . . that letter!” he exclaimed abruptly, in a hoarse voice. “She did not write it.”

Achanna unfolded the letter again, and handed it to his companion, who took it, only

Alasdair the Proud

in the belief that it was Gloom's doing. Alasdair's pulse leaped at the writing he knew so well. He started, and visibly trembled, when he saw and realised the date. The letter fluttered to the ground. When Gloom stooped to pick it up, he noticed that the veins on Alasdair's temples were purple and distended.

From his breast-pocket Alasdair drew another letter. This he unfolded and read. When he had finished, the flush was out of his white face, and was in his brow, where it lay a scarlet splatch.

He was dazed, for sure, Gloom thought, as he watched him closely; then suddenly began to play.

For a time Alasdair frowned. Then two tears rolled down his face. His mouth ceased twitching, and a blank idle look came into the dulled eyes.

Suddenly he began laughing.

Gloom Achanna ceased playing for a moment. He watched the man. Then he smiled, and played again.

He played the *Dân-nan-Ròn*, which had sent *Mànus MacCodrum* to his death among the seals; and the *Davsa-na-Mairv*, to which *Seumas* his brother had listened in a sweat of terror; and now he played the *dàn* which is known as the *Pibroch of the Mad*. He

Alasdair the Proud

walked slowly away, playing lightly as he went. He came to a rising ground, and passed over it, and was seen no more. Alasdair stood, intently listening. His limbs shook, Sweat poured from his face. His eyes were distended. A terror that no man can tell, a horror that is beyond words, was upon him. When he could hear no more, he turned and looked fearfully about him. Suddenly he uttered a hoarse cry. A man stood near him, staring at him curiously. He knew the man. It was himself. He threw up his arms. Then, slowly, he let them fall. It was life or death; he knew that; that he knew. Stumblingly he sank to his knees. He put out wavering hands, wet with falling tears, and cried in a loud, strident voice.

There was no meaning in what he said. But that which was behind what he cried was, "*Lord, deliver me from this evil! Lord, deliver me from this evil!*"

THE AMADAN ¹

I

The fishermen laughed when they saw "The Amadan," the fool, miscalculate his leap and fall from the bow of the smack *Tonn* into the shallows. He splashed clumsily, and stared in fear, now at the laughing men, now at the shore.

Stumbling, he waded through the shallows. A gull wheeled above his head, screaming. He screamed back. The men in the *Tonn* laughed.

The Amadan was tall, and seemed prematurely bent; his hair was of a dusty white, though he had not the look of age, but of a man in the prime of life.

It was not a month since Gloom Achanna had played madness upon him. Now, none of his Southland friends would have recognised Alasdair M'Ian, Alasdair the Proud. His clothes were torn and soiled; his mien was

¹ Pronounce Ūmādāwn.

The Amadan

wild and strange; but the change was from within. The spirit of the man had looked into hell. That was why Alasdair the Proud had become "The Amadan," the wandering fool.

It was a long way from Tiree to Askaig in the Lews, or the Long Island, as the Hebrideans call it. Alasdair had made Peter Macaulay laugh by saying that he had been sailing, sailing, from Tiree for a hundred years.

When he stood upon the dry sand, he looked at the smack wonderingly. He waved his hand.

"Where . . . where . . . is Tiree?" he cried. The men laughed at the question and at his voice. Suddenly old Ewan MacEwan rose and took his pipe from his mouth.

"That will do now, men, for sure," he said quietly. "It is God that did that. We have laughed too much."

"Oh," answered Peter Macaulay, abashed, "he is only an *amadan*. He does not know whether we laugh or why."

"God knows."

"Ay, ay, for sure. Well, to be sure, yes, you will be right in what you say, Ewan."

With that, Macaulay made as though he

The Amadan

would call to the man; but the old man, who was skipper, put him aside.

\ Ewan went to the bow, and slid over by a rope. He stood for a moment in his sea-boots, with the tide-wash reaching to his knees. Then he waded to the shore and went up to the man who was a fool.

“ Tell me, poor man, what is your name? ”

“ Enya. ”

“ Ay, that is all you will say. But that is not a man’s name. It is a woman’s name that. Tell me your name, poor man. ”

“ Enya—Enya of the Dark Eyes. ”

“ No, no, now, for sure, you said it was Aodh. ”

“ Yes; Aodh. Aodh the Proud. ”

“ Ah, for sure, may God give you peace, poor soul! It is a poor pride, I am fearing. ”

The man did not answer.

“ And have you no thought now of where you will be going? ”

“ Yes . . . no . . . yes . . . there is a star in the west. ”

“ Have you any money, poor man? Well, now, see here; here is a little money. It is a shilling and two pennies. It is all I have. But I have my mind, and God is good. Will you be caring, now, to have my pipe, poor man? A good smoke is a peaceful thing;

The Amadan

yes, now, here is my pipe. Take it, take it!"

But Alasdair M'Ian only shook his head. He took the money and looked at it. A troubled look came into his face. Suddenly there were tears in his eyes.

"I remember . . . I remember . . ." he began, stammeringly. "It is an old saying. It is . . . it is God . . . that builds . . . it is God that builds the nest . . . of the blind bird."

Ewan MacEwan took off his blue bonnet. Then he looked up into the great, terrible silence. God heard.

Before he spoke again, a man came over the high green-laced dune which spilt into the machar beyond the shore. He was blind, and was led by a dog.

Ewan gave a sigh of relief. He knew the man. It was Alan Dall. There would be help now for the Amadan, if help there could be.

He went towards the blind man, who stopped when he heard steps. "How tall and thin he was!" thought Ewan. His long, fair hair, streaked with grey, hung almost to his shoulders. His pale face was lit by the beauty of his spirit. It shone like a lamp. Blind though he was, there was a strange living light in his blue eyes.

The Amadan

“Who is it?” he asked, in the Gaelic, and in a voice singularly low and sweet.

“Who is it? I was lying asleep in the warm sand when I heard laughter.”

Ewan MacEwan went close to him, and told all he had to tell.

When he was done, Alan Dall spoke.

“Leave the poor man with me, Ewan my friend. I will guide him to a safe place, and mayhap Himself, to whom be praise, will build the nest that he seeks, blind bird that he is.”

And so it was.

It was not till the third day that Alan Dall knew who the Amadan was.

A heavy rain had fallen since morning. Outside the turf bothie where Alan Dall had his brief home, a ceaseless splash made a drowsy peace like the humming of bees. Through it moved in sinuous folds of sound a melancholy sighing; the breathing of the tide wearily lifting and falling among the heavy masses of wrack which clothed the rocks of the inlet above which the bothie stood.

Since he had eaten of the porridge and milk and coarse bread, brought him by the old woman who came every morning to see to his fire and food, Alan Dall had sat before the

The Amadan

peats, brooding upon many things, things of the moment, and the deep insatiable desires of the hungry spirit; but most upon the mystery of the man whom he had brought thither. He slept still, the poor Amadan. It was well; he would not arouse him. The sound of the rain had deep rest in it.

The night before, the Amadan, while staring into the red heart of the peats, had suddenly stirred.

“What is it?” Alan had asked gently.

“My name is Alasdair.”

“Alasdair? I too . . . I know well one who is named Alasdair.”

“Is he called Alasdair the Proud?”

“No; he is not called the Proud.”

“You have told me that your name is Alan?”

“Ay. I am called Alan Dall because I am blind.”

“I have seen your face before, or in a dream, Alan Dall.”

“And what will your father’s name be, and the name of your father’s fathers?”

“I do not know that name, nor the name of my clan.”

Thereupon a long silence had fallen. Thrice Alan spoke, but the Amadan either did not hear, or would make no answer.

The Amadan

An eddy of wind rose and fell. The harsh screaming cry of a heron rent the silence. Then there was silence again.

The Amadan stirred restlessly.

"Who was that?" he asked in a whisper.

"It was no one, Alasdair my friend."

Alasdair rose and stealthily went to the door. He lifted the latch and looked out.

The dog followed him, whimpering.

"*Hush-sh, Siùil!*" whispered Alan Dall.

The dog slipped beyond Alasdair. He put back his ears, and howled.

Alan rose and went to the Amadan, and took him by the sleeve, and so led him back to the stool before the glowing peats.

"Who did you think it was?" he asked, when the Amadan was seated again, and no longer trembled.

"Who was it, Alan Dall?"

"It was a heron."

"They say herons that cry by night are people out of the grave."

"It may be so. But there is no harm to them that hear if it is not their hour."

"It was like a man laughing."

"Who would laugh, here, in this lonely place, and at night; and for why?"

"I know a man who would laugh here, in

The Amadan

this lonely place, and at night, and for why too."

"Who?"

"His name is Gloom."

Alan Dall started. A quiver passed over his face, and his hand trembled.

"That is a strange name for a man, *Gruaim*. I have heard only of one man who bore that name."

"There can be only one man. His name is Gloom Achanna."

"*Gruaim Achanna*. Yes . . . I know the man."

He would not tell the Amadan that this man was his brother; or not yet. He, too, then, poor fool, had been caught in the mesh of that evil. And now, perhaps, he would be able to see through the mystery which beset this man whom he had taken to guard and to heal.

But Alasdair M'Ian said one saying only, and would speak no more; and that saying was, "He is not a man; he is a devil." Soon after this the Amadan suddenly lapsed into a swoon of sleep, even while words were stammering upon his lips.

But now Alan Dall understood better. A deeper pity, too, was in his heart. This poor man, this Amadan, was indeed his comrade, if

The Amadan

his cruel sorrow had come to him through Gloom Achanna.

When he rose in the morning at the first sobbing of the rainy wind, and saw how profoundly the Amadan slept, he did not wake him.

Thus it was that throughout that long day Alan Dall sat, pondering and dreaming before the peats, while Alasdair the Proud lay drowned in sleep.

The day darkened early, because of the dense mists which came out of the sea and floated heavily between the myriad grey reeds of the rain and the fluent green and brown which was the ground.

With the dusk the Amadan stirred. Alan Dall crossed to the inset bed, and stood listening intently.

Alasdair muttered strangely in his sleep; and though he had hitherto, save for a few words, spoken in the English tongue, he now used the Gaelic. The listener caught fragments only . . . *an Athair Uibhreach*, the Haughty Father . . . *Agus thug e aoradh dha*, and worshipped him . . . *Biodh uach-daranachd aca*, let them have dominion.

“Those evil ones that go with Gloom my brother,” he muttered; “those evil spirits have made their kingdom among his dreams.”

The Amadan

“Who are they who are about you?” he whispered.

The Amadan turned, and his lips moved. But it was as though others spoke through him—

*“Cha’n ann do Shiol Adhamh sinn,
Ach tha sinn de mhuinntir an Athar Uaibhrich.”*

We are not of the seed of Adam,
But we are the offspring of the Haughty Father.

Alan Dall hesitated. One of the white prayers of Christ was on his lips, but he remembered also the old wisdom of his fathers. So he kneeled, and said a *seun*, that is strong against the bitter malice of demoniac wiles.

Thereafter he put upon him this *eolas* of healing, touching the brow and the heart as he said *here* and *here*—

“Deep peace I breathe into you,
O weariness, here:
O ache, here!
Deep peace, a soft white dove to you;
Deep peace, a quiet rain to you;
Deep peace, an ebbing wave to you!
Deep peace, red wind of the east from you;
Deep peace, grey wind of the west to you;
Deep peace, dark wind of the north from you;
Deep peace, blue wind of the south to you!
Deep peace, pure red of the flame to you;
Deep peace, pure white of the moon to you;
Deep peace, pure green of the grass to you;

The Amadan

Deep peace, pure brown of the earth to you;
Deep peace, pure grey of the dew to you,
Deep peace, pure blue of the sky to you!
Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace of the sleeping stones to you!
Deep peace of the Yellow Shepherd to you,
Deep peace of the Wandering Shepherdess to you,
Deep peace of the Flock of Stars to you,
Deep peace from the Son of Peace to you,
Deep peace from the heart of Mary to you,
And from Briget of the Mantle
Deep peace, deep peace!
And with the kindness too of the Haughty Father
Peace!
In the name of the Three who are One,
Peace!
And by the will of the King of the Elements,
Peace! Peace!"

Then, for a time he prayed: and, as he prayed, a white and beautiful Image stood beside him, and put soft moonwhite hands upon the brow of the Amadan. In this wise the beauty of Alan Dall's spirit, that had become a prayer, was created by God into a new immortal spirit.

The Image was as a wavering reed of light, before it stooped and kissed the soul of Alasdair, and was at one with it.

Alasdair opened his eyes.

God had healed him.

NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Most of the contents of this book are printed for the first time: "Children of the Dark Star" appeared in The Dome, fifth quarterly issue, May, 1898; "The Wells of Peace" in Good Words in September, 1898; and "Enya of the Dark Eyes" in Literature, in the autumn, 1898. The first of the five parts of "Ulad of the Dreams" has been already printed as "The Melancholy of Ulad," a translation of which ("La Tristesse d'Ulad") appeared in L'Humanité Nouvelle of November, 1898; while the Chant to Fand in it has been set to music by M. Edmond Bailly. A passage on p. 182 has been reprinted from an earlier and cancelled story in The Washer of the Ford. The reader interested in the fast disappearing St. Brigit (St. Bride) customs allude to in "By the Yellow Moonrock" will find a full and authentic account in Mr. Alexander Carmichael's shortly forthcoming Òr agus Ob, to which, through a friend, I am indebted for the rare Gaelic verses and one or two points of detail.

One or two of the contents of The Dominion of Dreams will be included in the forthcoming French translation of representative tales selected from The Sin-Eater and The Washer of the Ford, by M. Henri D. Davray (Mercure de France).

F. M.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

BY MRS. WILLIAM SHARP

In its present form *The Dominion of Dreams* differs considerably from the first edition published in 1899 by Messrs. A. Constable (reprinted).

The revisions, the transference of certain of the stories from one volume to another, and the cancelling of the short tale "The House of Sand and Foam" are carried out in accordance with the instructions and wishes of the author. Thus, "The White Heron" will now be found in Vol. IV, *The Divine Adventure*; "The Sad Queen" and "The Woman with the Net" in Vol. II *The Washer of the Ford*. And to the present edition have been transferred "The Hills of Ruel" from the volume of selected *Spiritual Tales* (Patrick Geddes & Col, 1897, and David Nutt, 1904), and "The Birdeen" from *The Sin-Eater*; and from the same volume also, "The Anointed Man," "The Dàn-nan-Ròn," and "Green Branches," in order that all the stories relating to the Achanna brothers may be grouped together in a separate section under the title of "Under the Dark Star." This regrouping of the contents of the original volume has necessitated further alterations: "The Herdsman" has been transferred to Vol. VI; and to *The Dominion of Dreams* have been added "The Sight" and "The Dark Hour of Fergus" from *The Washer of the*

Bibliographical Note

Ford; "Morag of the Glen" contributed originally to *The Savoy Magazine* (November, 1896), and included in the Tauchintz volume *The Sunset of Old Tales*, 1905. "The Archer" appeared first in the selected volume of *Tragic Romances* (Patrick Geddes & Co., 1897, and David Nutt, 1904), and was included in the Tauchintz volume *Wind and Wave*, 1905, in an altered form and under the title of "Silis." This tale was rewritten several times; and I have selected for the present edition the revised version that retains the opening and closing sections with the vision of the Archer whence the story drew its name. The curtailing of the opening portion of "The Yellow Moonrock" is the work of the author; and "A Memory of Beauty" as it now stands is all that he wished retained of the story entitled "The Daughter of the Sun" that originally formed a part of *The Sin-Eater, and Other Tales*.

