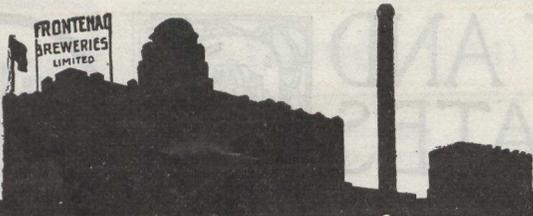


The Sea - Girl

(Continued from page 6.)



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his calves and his farm and his life. Katy but half happy, at his side, for always through Thady's conversation would come a "Mollie said," or "as Mollie tould me about Dublin," and Katie was afraid.

The two strolled along the cliff, Thady's arm round the girl's shoulders. The great wind was falling, the smell of the seaweed left by the turning tide came strongly to them. The kelp gatherers were out in the creeks and bays at the edge of the sea, dashing waist deep into the sea as they used their long rakes to secure their harvest.

Thady and Katie walked far, shelter was hard to find. Coming back by the slated lodges at the edge of the bay which look out blind and dreary, at the Atlantic from September to June, Mollie in a new dress was waiting for hem. She had got a pot of jam for Thady's tea. She had sent for a cheap match-box for him, to Dublin, and gave it to him. She had ordered a picture paper, and showed him photographs of races and plays in the world which he had never seen. And as they talked Katie sat silent, touching no tea, two scarlet spots flaring on her thin cheeks. A misery they were powerless to understand behind her dark eyes, she was only little Katie, shabby and ill dressed, and her sister was taking away her man from her.

"There ye are, Thady. I was just comin' back from carryin' eggs to Cliffview, the family is in."

Mollie Crehan was often somewhere when Thady, after his work, came over to see Katie. He had to pass the gaunt, half-ruined Hotel, and finding it vexed Katie when Mollie met him, he tried the path below it along the cliff, and now Mollie met him there.

With no change in his loyalty, Thady liked joking with the fat, handsome Mollie, his sister-in-law to be, but he was too simply kind to want to vex the girl he was to marry in a month.

"We'll walk up along the fields," Mollie said. "Katie's busy at the house, washin'. Mamma 'll be losht without her. Ah! 'tis well for her." She eyed Thady lovingly. "If 'twas meself now, I'd be dhressin' meself to look grand for ye. But sure," and she sighed, "I've no boy I cares for."

Thady laughed, flattered. Mollie knew the weak points of mankind.

They had to cross a bank and ditch into the field next the house, Mollie slipped in her tight short skirt, called coquettishly to Thady to catch her. "I'm slippin'," she cried, lying helpless against his shoulder.

"The fine lump of a girl ye are," he said carelessly. Next minute he kissed the fat pink cheek so close to his face, and got a slap and kissed her again.

Molly clung to him, well satisfied. She was convinced that Thady had made a mistake, that he ought to marry her. And neither of them saw Katie out by the turf stack, believing that the end of everything had come.

And yet, even as Thady kissed the girl, he was sorry. He did not want to hurt Katie, her wild words had made an impression on him. He had meant no harm and yet he was sorry and wanted to make it up to his girl.

He pushed Mollie away almost roughly, angry with himself and her. A dozen people might have seen them. He hurried on, Mollie smirking by his side.

Katie met them near the cottage. Her olive skin was very pale save where two spots flamed. Her eyes were not good to look at. The fiery blood of Spain was in her veins, moving her to something she could not understand. She was the re-incarnation of some mantilla'd ancestress.

Thady, his warm heart overflowing, went quickly towards her. He was sorry.

"Ye're airly, Thady," Katie said, and he started at her voice.

"I was in a hurry to be wid ye," he whispered.

"An' Mollie helped ye to hurry."

She drew a long breath. She was in her oldest dress in a red shawl, her black hair loose. They did not know how she had torn off a new white blouse, bought with some egg money, and torn down her hair, and even kicked her shoes from her arched feet.

"There is a great say on," she said. "Let us walk to the Point. Come, Mollie, wid us."

"Lave Mollie," Thady whispered.

"Come, Mollie," Katie said, as if she had not heard.

Mollie giggled as she said she might be intrudin'.

"Ye would not intrude where Thady is. Isn't that so, Thady? Arrah! Come on, Mollie. Ye can do the grand talkin' always."

MOLLIE came readily, ogling and giggling, surer than ever now of her success. Something made Thady afraid. Katie was so curiously gay, so strangely lovely with her scarlet cheeks and shining eyes. She darted on in front of them, rushing down to the sea, for the tide was in, then climbing up to the cliffs.

She stopped then, shading her eyes, and holding her hand.

"The say is callin'," she cried. "One will go before to-morry. Listen, 'tis callin' . . . loud."

Under the swish and crash of the waves ran a long moaning note, caused in reality by the shifting of the quicksands in the treacherous bay, but at Dunhaven they say the sea calls. Calls for a human life to appease its wrath, and curious as it may seem it seldom calls in vain.

"It's callin' loud," said Katie, her eyes flaming curiously.

Katie led on and they followed. When they reached Poule Na Quirka, Katie sprang on to the bank. The air was alive here with the dash and roar of the waters, the rush of the wind with the salt strong on it, and below them the sullen caged sea sucked and swirled, and they could hear the tortured rumbling in the cave.

Mollie said, "Arrah wisha, 'tis awesome." She nestled coquettishly against Thady as if she were afraid before she got on to the bank.

"Let us go back up to be Mrs. Cassidy's," she said, shivering. "I'm afeard here. Come, Thady, help me off the bank."

Thady, perturbed and puzzled, turned to look at the plump hands. He had strolled away from the girls.

"Ah! Ye'll never go anywhere again." Katie's slight arms gripped her sister, dragging her on to the foot wide ledge between the bank and the gulf. "Ye have stole me man from me, Mollie. I saw ye two kissin' to-day, but ye'll never live to marry him."

"Katie! God in Heaven above. I never meant to wrong ye." Thady dashed towards the struggling pair. Mollie was big and strong, but she wasted breath in terrified shrieks and the demon of passionate jealousy in her gave Katie strength to hold her.

The narrow ledge was covered with coarse grass and the girl's feet were firmly planted.

"Down, sisther Mollie. Ye shall drown with meself, and Thady watch ye."

"Katie!" Thady lay across the bank trying to hold both girls. "Katie, listen. I love ye only, as there is God above. 'Twas but a kiss she med me give her. Darlin', lave go and come to me."

His terrified voice rang with unmistakable love and truth. It broke the madness in Katie's brain. With a breathed, "God forgive me," Katie released her hold, but Mollie, mad with fear, scarcely heard or understood, or saw the demon leave her sister's face. Feeling herself getting free, she caught at Thady with one hand and pushed her hardest with the other.

A streak of brown and red flew from the cliff. A scream which rose high above the din of the water burst from all three, and something clove the dull green sucking waters below.

Then Katie's face came to the sur-