

The Window of Dun-Angus.

By Alice L. Milligan.

I

Dun Angus lies far away on the Old World's very edge, where are the Islands of the Evening Star. By this name I call in my story the Isles of Arran, that are westward of Ireland in the Atlantic Sea. Look out towards them at eventide from the Connacht shore. They float in the crimson land of sunset, where islands and clouds, sea and heaven, seem blended. The great sun goes down beyond them, the evening star is kindled over them, and when at length it is truly night, you find that they have not faded with other clouds of twilight, but see them floating still like dark-hulled ships upon the gloaming sea, then you know they are islands.

On the western coast of the largest of them is a sheer line of cliffs, of giddy height, walling off the ocean. Dun-Angus, a great fort of stone, stands on the very verge above the green water. Its vast broken circle engirdles a space of level floor thinly grass-grown. The stone circle, however, breaks at the cliff edge, and you can peer straight down into the marbling waves and watch the sea-birds hovering, and the black-headed seals swimming, and the white surge flashing and fading far, far below.

No house is within the fort, but once a lordly house stood there. Along the inside of the wall run ledges for fighting-men to stand upon, and there are steps for them to climb by. Outside, rank upon rank, like warriors bewitched to that grim stillness, are sharp-pointed standing stones. They were ranged there to break the rush of the enemy against the fort wall. You shall hear how that came. Many a time those stones were red with blood that gushed out hot from the spear wounds and sword hacks made in the breasts and sides of men, while cries of pain rang out shriller than the shrieks of the sea-birds.

There are many tales to be told of Dun-Angus, but the one I am about to tell is the most terrible of them all, a tale of love and hate, of wooing and pursuing, of bloodshed and fire and death. Were it told aright it would make the flesh chill upon your bones, and the hair thrill about your brow, and the heart in your breast grow faint with fear and wonder.

There was a warrior lived in the great fort once. Angus he was called. His name clings to the place yet, and maybe his ghost haunts it, though he is dead a thousand years and more. Go there at night when the moon is riding through racing clouds and the wind breathes in from the west and the league-long billows swing against the cliff wall. You will see sights undreamed-of in the broad glare of the day; white ghostly shapes leaping and writhing down on the rocks below, black flitting spectres crossing the floor of the fort, strange shadowy and shining forms in the gloom of the doorway and couchant among the stone army that stand agard without. Tossing spray showers, you say, and shadows of the clouds, and moreover that the moans and wails you will hear are the gurgle of waves in the caverns or the wind caoing through the stones.

Such things are easily accounted for! But when you have heard the story of Angus you will allow that there should be ghosts here, and that maybe these are the ghosts of unhappy men and women that haunt the place of their misery and fill the midnight air with pitiful lamentations. There was a lady, nobly born, Findavar, a king's daughter, with knee-long shadowy dark hair, and eyes blue as the mountain loch. She lived on the Connacht shore between the mountains and the sea. In her maiden musings she walked often on the yellow sand, and all her heart's longings went out over the shining water to the cloudlike isles that floated purple in the sunset under the evening star.

The woodlands and the moors and lakes and the soaring mountains of her

father's territory were of no account to her. The rush of the brown salmon-abounding streams, the roar of the wind through forest boughs, stirred her little; but when she came to the rocks and the sands beside the sea and looked westward, and breathed the wind that came brine-laden from beyond the edge of the world, it was as if a spell was wrought upon her. Her heart tingled with strange and nameless hopes, her eyes softened with tender tears, her cheek flushed as if at the kiss of a fairy lover invisible and divine. "And oh," she thought, "what joy to sail out into the sunset and dwell in some palace of those purple isles!"

At length her longing was fulfilled. Once as she paced upon the strand on a breezy day of May, of a sudden a currach came plunging through the white crest of a wave and tossed in upon the shore. Then through the shallowing foam a tall stranger came striding. He shouldered an oar and dragged the light currach with one hand. He was noble and tall, with hair ruddier than gold flowing about him, and eyes blue and glancing. He had splendid manly limbs and a sunburnt countenance. His cloak was of scarlet and yellow

hair might fall and hide those blushes. But the stranger from the sea, with caressing hand, tossed back those veiling tresses and kissed away the tears, and now she had nowhere to hide her rosy face except upon his heart.

When he saw that he had tamed her, he let her slip from his arms unto the sand, and with wooing glance and tender words bade her wait. There she sat trembling but very meek whilst he brought the currach into the waves, then turned to her with outstretched arms. Now she saw that his purpose was to bear her away, and she rose in doubt and would have turned to flee; but, "No," she thought, "that were vain. He is swifter than I." And then she would have cried aloud for her brothers; but, "Oh," she thought, "he would slay them, for he is strong; or, haply, they would slay or wound him." And then in her heart she knew she would not have him hurt, and turned her gaze to look upon him where he stood between the waters and the land, in the pride and beauty of his manhood.

He pointed to the islands across the sea, and then he spoke in a voice soft as the whisper of the surge on the shallow as it creeps over and is drunk in by the sand, telling her that he must bear his fair love safe to his island fort before night came with its stars.

Still she wavered, and yet he stood



with gorgeous embroidery. A brooch of gold flamed below his throat in a great golden circle, and the pin of it went from shoulder to shoulder.

"His ornaments are those of a king," thought the wondering maiden, and she remembered tales of divine warriors who rose from the ocean and wooed the daughters of men. Sea-princes of the tribe of Mananaan Mac-Lir. This was one such, surely!

Suddenly he saw the maiden. He flung out his arms and laughed aloud joyously, then dropped the currach that he was dragging, and came to her side with swift strides. Was he man or sea-god, he said not to sue, but lifted her to his shoulder, and clasping her with strong arms, turned seaward without delay.

So much she wondered, and so fearfully her heart beat, that she could not find voice to cry aloud, though her brothers and certain of her father's people were within hearing in a woodland brake near the strand, where they tracked the deer. She trembled like a leaf, and when at last fear overcame her wonder and she struggled, as if she would fain escape, he took her closer in his arms, and kissed her on her red lips, and looked into her blue eyes, laughing triumphantly.

Then, because no lover had kissed her till now, her face grew like the sunset sky, and tears welled in her eyes, and to hide them she drooped her shapely head, so that her shadowy

there, and he touched her no more, only entreated her with looks of love and soft words, and always held his arms forth to take her.

Of a sudden came the yelp of hounds and cry of men as the deer broke from the woodland unto the shore, and lo! there were her brothers running along the sand with brazen spears poised in the chase.

With a little cry of fear she fled, swiftly as the deer, but those waiting arms were her shelter.

The stranger shouted in joy and defiance as he swung her to the currach, then wading beside her, pushed it through the waves and leaped to the rower's seat.

His strong arms sent it speeding through the water swiftly as a sea-going salmon.

The hounds and hunters ran to the beach, for the deer had taken to the water; but lo! the sons of that King of Connacht saw how they had lost more than their hunting-prey. Over the green waves they beheld a currach dancing, and in it was their maiden sister (they knew her by her blue mantle spreading on the wind). She was leaving home and kindred, and a royal husband destined for her, and she knew not even her lover's name, though she went with him of her own accord; but he was Angus of the island Dun, no prince at all, but one that lived by plunder and unlawful prey.

By the time the stars came out that night over the purple water, Findavar sat at the feast in the house of the Dun by the side of her Formorian lover. The round house was full of light and noise; in the midst of it the flames licked up about the great brazen caldron, and the smoke rose wavering to the tentlike roof and spread there in a blue mist and curled up out into the air. The princess sat as in a dream, divided between joy and fear. Now the room flared red around her, and she saw in the fierce brightness the faces of all those revellers. Now the fire suddenly gloomed, and the wall was blackened with a ring of grotesque goblin shapes, their shadows. Black monster hands and arms were waved at her from the hollow circle of the roof. Findavar trembled till she found the strong hand of Angus that lay close to hers. Then he clasped it, and forgot to touch the mead that foamed in his oaken mether, and cared only to gaze on the fair face of his stolen lady, and to seek to win a glance from her shy and timid eyes. He rejoiced in his heart and thought:

"I had never so fair a love as this, nor one that came to my arms so willingly. She is so young, so young; she will be my one love and only till fate send me a fairer."

Then he looked where among the women folk a red-haired girl he had stolen from Kerry sat, sad and sullen. She was not sad for him, however, nor jealous at all of the bride, though the son of Angus—and hers he was too—played beside her knee, a merry child and comely and strong.

"She is saucy and proud as ever," thought the pirate; "and since she only wept at my kisses I will trouble her no more. She shall grind at the quern, and can weep her fill there for that lover of hers she left forlorn when I bore her away." He kissed Findavar before the whole company, and laughed to catch the eyes of Shav fixed on him in moody hate.

The revel grew louder, and above it all Findavar heard confusedly the voice of a bard troling forth some song to praise her beauty and the valor of Angus. She heard the twanging of ill-tuned strings, and noted the coarseness of the singer's voice. Then she sighed softly, remembering the harp and sweet music of her father's court in Connacht.

And yet surely this unknown prince of the island, her lord and lover, had wealth and glory, and might have sweeter music for the asking. His and clear blue pebble. A mine of gold in plenty, and he had decked Findavar with the rarest beads of yellow amber and clear blue pebble. A mind of gold like the young moon shone over her white brow against the darkness of her hair. She wondered, therefore, at the hoarse bard and the ill-tuned harp, for she held music as more glorious and fitting in a king's house than either gems or gold.

"But come," said Angus, swinging aside a curtain that hid the foot of a little stair behind their feasting-seat. "Come, see, and tell me if there be in any palace of Connacht as wondrous a grinning as this I have decked for my bride."

He led her up the stair to a room that was small and dark. From one narrow window they could gaze down upon the revellers. A faint light came through it and showed that the wattle-work had been hastily hidden with costly hangings of scarlet, on which were embroidered serpents and other mystic twinning things.

Angus reached up his strong arm and undid a bolt that let a door swing outward. And lo! through that empty space there was nothing to be seen but the deep gloom of the heaven, lit with great white stars and streaked with the faint glimmering of the Milky Way. Findavar shuddered, yet rejoiced. She had in truth come to her island of the stars led by a fairy lover. He drew her to the window, and holding her in strong arms, let her lean forth. The cold night wind breathed through her hair, bringing with it into the curtained room the strange fresh scent of the sea. Findavar suddenly cried aloud, and lo! she found no garden bower, no grassy lawn, no scented boughs of apple-trees below the window of this