

IN THE SKIRT O' THE WIND.

Una Morrin was sighing as she tidied up the kitchen for the evening after the meal. She sighed as she piled high the turf on the fire. She sighed as she raked the embers under the Dutch oven which held the cake for the morning. She sighed again as she brushed back the ashes of the hearth, and she heaved a mournful "Mhuire's tragh!" as she drew out the stool and sat down to card some wool. And it was a bad sign for Una Morrin to be sighing like that, because she was always the light-hearted girl, was Una Morrin.

Though she possessed the thrift—and all the need of it that often drives the inhabitants of Ireland's coast country from their homes—to-night the "cards" lay idle in her hands, while she gazed, wide-eyed and long, through the chinks of red glow which the loosely heaped turf made upon which the coals beneath. Faith, there was a weary look on the face of Seon Ban's daughter, as if she were thinking long for the voice of some one. And it was not her prayers that kept her silent.

Outside the wind blew hard, as the winds of Connacht do, when they whip in from the sea on stormy nights. Its wail rose and fell between the booming of the surf that beats against the rocks at the foot of Maev's Cliff. Now and then an alien noise would pierce the thundering of the sea and wind—a sound of falling boards, a slamming of a neighbor's door, the creak of hinges straining to be loose. Aye, and through the wildness of the night there came the sorrowful note that is heard only along the Erse coast, when the women of the fishing folk sit within their cottages, hugging memories of nights long past, bitter recollections of this night or of that day, when their lad or himself went out to sea—and did not return. Was it the wild cry of poor souls drowned, that came through the stillness of storm and drifting winds to those of the lonely hearth? God knows!

Starting from her reverie, Una Morrin arose to light the candle. The noise of the stopten grating upon the earthen floor aroused old Moira from her doze. "What's keepin' Niall Murtagh these nights, alanna?"

"How should I know, Granny?" the girl exclaimed impatiently. But her cheeks and neck showed red, and it was not the glow of the candle's light that made it so.

"He has not been here since the Sunday that brought Jamie McElin in here. Had ye any words?"

"For what should we have words?" "I don't know, I don't know, at all. Only I thought he was 'extrem wid the actin' ye had wid Jamie McElin."

findin' fault with him, an' isn't it as well that you are here wid your old grandmother as bein' over there among strangers as Nora is, wid not a soul near her from the village? Sure it's not lonely you are for them that writes to you only to trouble you with longin' when they know you cannot leave your old Granny?"

"Ay, it's lonely I am, Granny, an' wishful for the ones beyant. An' why shouldn't I be, wid all belongin' to me over there save you, Granny? Whin I sit on the beach on an evening, an' the little waves come creepin' in an' breakin' themselves against the rocks below, my heart is breakin' wid them, an' I can hear the whispurin' o' voices in them, their voices, Ned's an' Dominic's an' Moira's, and the liltin' voice of Noreen. D'ye mind the voice of our Noreen, Granny?"

The girl had been playing idly with the tongs, but now she dropped them absently, and with hands hanging listlessly before her, she sat and stared with wet-ear eyes into the fire.

There was silence broken only by the clicking of the old woman's beads against one another.

Una looked up from the fire at her grandmother's face. There were tears, too, in Granny's eyes.

"'Tis the will o' God, and He knows best, acushla, an' sure, agragh, I'll soon be goin' home an' then—"

Una arose abruptly and kissed her. "Orra, Granny, dear, don't be talkin' that way. Sure I would not be leavin' you at all. Doesn't Neddeen want me to bring you out—"

"God forgive the poor lad, an' give him sense, an' what would I be doin' out there?"

Una went over to open the half-door, where argument was useless.

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know that it was the gold watch which her brother Dominic had sent from New York to Niall Murtagh. It was a souvenir of another evening such as this, when young Murtagh had saved her brother's life.

"I should like to give this to you, if he did not come back," Michael O'Gallagher whispered in her ear, as if they could be heard on the storm-swept beach, "but God send that you may have the chance to give it back to him, Una agragh."

She placed the watch in her bosom, and lifting her eyes looked wistfully toward the sea. A solid wall of darkness seemed to lie between those on shore and the waters that belched and roared beyond the rocks. Only the white foam and salt spray came in to beat upon their faces as they stood there, waiting for their knew not what.

At last she turned to him with a quick anxious movement and demanded: "Did you hear that?"

"Whisht!" she cried, "there it is again! God and His angels be wid us! It's his voice, his voice I tell you!"

And before she could utter another word she was being pulled by the neck of her coat towards the house of Paudheen Gill.

Michael O'Gallagher stood staring helplessly after her.

Gap wid Old Paudheen, and they are goin' out after the drowned man!"

With a bound Michael was speeding over the rocks towards the little out-bow below the house of Paudheen Gill. The other men followed him, but one pausing before he went with the rest, called to the girl who had brought the news: "Run Kathie, and bring Father Joyce. For the love of God, hurry, colleen! We'll hold her until he comes."

But Kathie O'Gallagher had no need to run all the distance to the priest's house, for she met the man who had first carried the news to the village, returning, not with Father Joyce, for that good man was back in the country somewhere on a sick call, but with a white-robed Dominican, Father Edward McHugh, who had come straight from the chapel where he had been reciting his office. Lithe and agile as any of the fishermen, this tall young priest, with rapid steps was hastening toward the Gap in a moment, careless of slippery rocks or driving wind.

Down at the Gap a fierce struggle was taking place. Through the mist the young priest could discern a dark mass of men swaying back and forth, their arms and legs tossing back and forth, now nearing the boat at the water's edge, now crushing back the gigantic form of a rugged old fisherman. When Father Edward drew closer he could only hear the labored breath of the men who were striving with the old man, Paudheen Gill, who with oars in hand was trying to break the little phalanx before him. Una Morrin, with another pair of oars was guarding the boat from a possible attack.

Even as the priest came upon them a cry arose: "Hold her, hold her! She's gone without him!"

And she was. For giving up all hope of going out to the rescue when she saw the white habit of the Dominican rising out of the mist, she made one desperate leap into the boat, and pushing out from the shore was threading her way through the small rocks when they saw her.

With the thundering voice of authority the priest called out: "Una Morrin, Una Morrin, in the name of God I command you to come back!"

voice of the priest rose, firm and strong, above the noise of the storm, which was now abating.

"I hear singin' out there," said a little boy, whom his father had not been able to drive home.

"Pray for us at the hour of our death—"

"I tell ye, I hear singin'! Can't ye hold yer whist?"

"Send that child home," Father Edward ordered. And with a "clout" over the head as an inducement, the boy's father was obeying.

But Kathie O'Gallagher had run down to the water's edge and was listening. Suddenly she threw her arms up in the air, and falling on her knees she cried: "May God and His Holy Mother be praised. I hear the voice of Niall O'G."

A hush fell on the kneeling crowd. Yes, with the drifting wind and mist there came through the ocean's roar the clear tones of "Hail, Queen of Heaven, the Ocean Star," and the voice was that of Niall Murtagh. He sang as cheerily as if it were on the calmest of seas. It was a way that Niall Murtagh had in moments of danger.

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