

Clodagh swayed a little.

"Drowned!" she echoed in a faint voice.

"He niver went home at all last night. And to-day mornin' they found the little boat capsized beyant at the head. O God, help the poor mother! What'll the poor woman do at all?"

"Drowned!" Clodagh said again—"drowned! Larry drowned!"

Hannah stepped forward, as though she expected her to fall; but she motioned her away.

"How did it happen?" she asked in a vague, thin voice.

"'Twas the storm! Sure, 'twas the storm!"

"But Larry was the best sailor in Carrigmore!"

She said the words involuntarily; but as they left her lips, they brought into being a new thought. She stood upright, and by a strange, slow process of suggestion, her eyes travelled to the mantelpiece, where the bundle of notes still protruded from under the clock.

What if Larry had quailed before the thought of confessing his losses to the querulous mother, who could so ill spare the money he had squandered? What if Larry had not fought the storm last night as it might have been fought? She suddenly contemplated last night's play from Larry's point of view—contemplated Larry's losses by light of the hard monetary straits that Ireland breeds.

Her blood seemed to turn to water; she felt like one beyond the pale of human emotion or superhuman help.

"Leave me to myself, Hannah!" she said faintly.

"I want to be alone."

"Lave you? But, my darlin'——"

"I must be alone."

Hannah looked at her in agonised concern.

"Miss Clodagh——" she began. But something in Clodagh's stony quiet daunted her. She gave a muffled sob, and moved slowly across the room.

Clodagh was conscious of the wailing sounds of grief for several minutes after she had disappeared; then gradually they faded, as she descended into the lower regions, to share the appalling and yet grimly fascinating news with Burke and the farm-labourers; and silence reigned in the lonely room.