

Nine Tides of Sron-Na-Boghar.

N. Tourneur

“**S**TAY at home, my lad, stay at home. Better lay amang the saft warm sheets, this nicht, than the ground weed round the Scaur Rocks,” mumbled the White Witch of Drumore.

I looked earnestly at her as she bent over the peat and driftwood crackling on the open hearth. Against the blaze the stunted figure of her was silhouetted like a hunchback’s. Dusting the top of the meal ark, I sat down on it alongside her.

“What will happen, mistress?” I asked. “As you know, I am going out on the night tide, over the Bay to the Isle of Whitern. Is there bad weather brewing?”

“Stay at hame, my lad, stay at hame.”

“That I cannot do, mistress, without causing vexation to others, near and dear to me,” I replied. “Is there any danger then?”

“Mair than you, or I, or most of us want. Gin ye go, it is a farther cry that’s yours than owre the Bay. Rest ye ashore, my gentleman, till morning.”

Vainly I pressed her for an explanation. Silently she continued to stir her porridge, her dull eyes now and again resting on me.

“Well Mistress, your porridge is done, and you’re going to have your supper; I’ll be off,” I said, nettled at her obstinate silence. “Is it a burst of wind you mean? Crossing the Bay, tonight, is as safe as walking down the village street here! The breeze has westered, and is falling too. Tuts, mistress, I thought you could tell something!”

She reared up her meagre figure. “Ay, I can tell ye mair nor that. Three sailor laddies have I weaned in my days o’ mitherhood. Nane o’ them would listen to my tellings, and woe’s me, the kirk-

yaird doesn’ hap their bodies. The Nine Tides aye took them.”

“The Nine Tides! What Tides are they? I’ve seen two tides instead of one, mistress, but never heard of nine.”

“The Nine Tides o’ Shron-Na-Boghar, as the Mull o’ Galloawa’ was ca’d in the auld times,” she replied. “This I ken, sir, and ken weel—before the chap o’ midnicht the Nine Tides will be calling, calling, on you. And ye’ll see the Spanish ship they beguiled. The Hand o’ God keep ye.”

“Sir, I ken it,” she added fiercely. “My three weans they cry it in my ear. Guid sir, I am not mad.”

I stepped out of the cottage and looked about. The sun was now sunk, leaving the west bathed in gold. The little fleecy clouds, amethyst and gold, seemed almost stationary. On the other side of Luce Bay, I could see Craignarget Hill, sixteen miles away,—a long ridge of soft blue against the azure of the evening sky. According to the weather-vane on the old flour-mill opposite, the wind was blowing from the south-west—steadily it seemed to me. With a laugh at the White Witch’s fears, I said good-night to her, and took my way to the harbor.

Never better weather for crossing the Bay to the Isle, thought I; and whistling for my seaman, I gaily reached the seaward quay.

As we slid past Cairgarrock Bay, making southward, to gain the flow that runs strong in that direction towards the Isle, eighteen miles away, I let my eyes rove up the long bay behind us. Its smooth surface shimmered with the fading gold of the August sunset, which here and there was interlaced with branching stretches of faint green and silver, shot occasionally with varying blue where undercurrents disturbed the reflections. There was no sound save the gurgling of