

**SHARP**  
**WILLIAM**

PHARSAIS; AND,  
THE MOUNTAIN  
LOVERS

William Sharp

**Pharais; and, The Mountain Lovers**

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**Sharp W.**

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# William Sharp

## Pharais; and, The Mountain Lovers

### FOREWORD

INTO this collected edition are gathered all the writings of William Sharp published under his pseudonym "Fiona Macleod," which he cared to have preserved; writings characterised by the distinctive idiom he recognised to be the expression of one side of his very dual nature – of the spiritual, intuitive, subjective self as distinct from the mental, reasoning, objective self.

In the preparation of this edition I have carefully followed the author's written and spoken instructions as to selection, deletion, and arrangement. To the preliminary arrangement he gave much thought, especially to the revision of the text, and he made considerable changes in the later version of certain of the poems and tales. In one instance only have I acted on my own judgment, and have done so because I felt satisfied he would have offered no objection to my suggestion. In accordance with his decision the romance *Green Fire* is not reissued in its entirety, because he considered the construction of it to be seriously defective. He rewrote the second half of the story – the only portion he cared to keep – renamed it "The Herdsman" and included it in *The Dominion of Dreams*. Scattered throughout *Green Fire* there are a number of "Thoughts" which I and other readers are desirous of preserving; I have therefore gathered them together and have included them in the form of detached "Fragments."

The *Laughter of Peterkin* is also excluded, because it is a retelling of old familiar Celtic tales and not primarily an original work. Two of these retellings, however, *Deirdre and the Sons of Usna*, and *The Four White Swans* have been published separately in America by Mr. Mosher (Portland, Maine).

Though the "Fiona Macleod" phase belongs to the last twelve years of William Sharp's life, the formative influences which prepared the way for it went back to childhood. Though "the pains and penalties of impecuniosity" during his early struggles in London tended temporarily to silence the intuitive subjective side of his nature in the necessary development of the more objective intellectual "William Sharp" – critic, biographer, essay and novel writer as well as poet – he never lost sight of his desire to give expression to his other self.

William Sharp was born in 1855 of Scottish parents (he died at Maniace, Sicily, in 1905), was educated at the Academy and University of Glasgow, and spent much of his youth among the Gaelic-speaking fisher-folk and shepherds of the West Highlands. After a voyage to Australia for his health, he settled in London in 1878 and strove to make for himself a place in the profession of Literature. His friendships with Rossetti, Browning, Pater, Meredith were important factors in his development; and later he came into valued personal touch with W. D. Howells, Richard Stoddart, Edward Clarence Stedman, and other English and American men of letters.

In 1886, not long after his marriage, he suffered a serious illness and a protracted convalescence. During the enforced leisure he dreamed many dreams, saw visions, and remembered many things out of the past both personal and racial. He determined, should he recover, to bend every effort to ensure the necessary leisure wherein to write that which lay nearest his heart. Accordingly in 1889 he left London for a time. The first outcome of a wonderful winter and spring in Rome was a volume of verse, in unrhymed metre, *Sospiri di Roma*, privately published in 1891, and followed in 1893 by a volume of dramatic interludes, *Vistas*; and, though both are a blending of the two elements of the poet's dual nature, they to some extent foreshadowed the special phase of work that followed. He was feeling his way, but did not find what he sought until he wrote *Pharais*, the first of the series of books which he issued under the pseudonym of "Fiona Macleod."

In the sunshine and quiet of a little cottage in Sussex; in the delight in "the green life" about him; impelled by the stimulus of a fine friendship, he had gone back to the influences of his early

memories, and he began to give expression to his vision of the Beauty of the World, of the meaning of Life, of its joys and sorrows. The ultimate characteristic expression of his "dream self" was due to the inspiration and incentive of the friend to whom he dedicated *Pharais*. It was, as he states in a letter to me written in 1896, "to her I owe my development as 'Fiona Macleod,' though in a sense, of course, that began long before I knew her, and indeed while I was a child"; and again, "without her there would never have been any 'Fiona Macleod.'"

The volumes appeared in quick succession. *Pharais* in 1894; *The Mountain Lovers* in 1895; *The Sin-Eater* in 1895; *The Washer of the Ford* in 1896; *Green Fire* in 1896; *The Laughter of Peterkin* in 1897; *The Dominion of Dreams* in 1899; and a volume of poems, *From the Hills of Dream*, in 1896. A second serious illness intervened, and in 1900 he published *The Divine Adventure*, and in 1904 *The Winged Destiny*. Of his two dramas, written in 1898-9, *The House of Usna* was performed by the Stage Society in London in 1900, and was issued in book form in America by Mr. Mosher in 1903; *The Immortal Hour* was published in America in 1907 and in England in 1908. The volume of nature essays, *Where the Forest Murmurs*, and an enlarged edition of *From the Hills of Dream* were also published posthumously.

For twelve years the name of "Fiona Macleod" was one of the mysteries of contemporary literature. The question of "her" identity provoked discussion on both sides of the Atlantic; conjecture at times touched the truth and threatened disclosure. But the secret was loyally guarded by the small circle of friends in whom he had confided. "'Fiona' dies" he was wont to say, "should the secret be found out." These friends sympathised with and respected the author's desire to create for himself, by means of a pseudonym, the necessary seclusion wherein to weave his dreams and visions into outward form; to write a series of Celtic poems, romances and essays different in character from the literary and critical work with which William Sharp had always approached his public.

In a letter to an American friend written in 1893, before he had decided on the use of the pseudonym, he relates: "I am writing a strange Celtic tale called *Pharais*, wherein the weird charm and terror of the night of tragic significance is brought home to the reader (or I hope so) by a stretch of dew-sweet moonflowers glimmering white through the mirk of a dust laden with sea-mist. Though the actual scene was written a year ago and one or other of the first parts of *Pharais*, I am going to rewrite it." In 1895 he wrote to the same friend who had received a copy of the book, and who, remembering the statement, was puzzled by the name of the author: "Yes, *Pharais* is mine. It is a book out of the core of my heart... Ignored in some quarters, abused in others, and unheeded by the general reader, it has yet had a reception that has made me deeply glad. It is the beginning of my true work. Only one or two know that I am 'Fiona Macleod.'" To the last the secret was carefully guarded for him, until he passed "from the dream of Beauty to Beauty."

In the author's "Foreword" to the Tauchnitz selection of the Fiona Macleod Tales, entitled *Wind and Wave*, he has set down in explanation what here may be fittingly reprinted. He explains that in certain sections are tales of the old Gaelic and Celtic-Scandinavian life and mythology; that in others there is a blending of Paganism and Christianity; in others again "are tales of the dreaming imagination having their base in old mythology or in a kindred mythopœic source... They divide broadly into tales of the world that was and tales of the world that is, because the colour and background of the one series are of a day that is past, and past not only for us, but for the forgetting race itself; while the colour and background of the other, if interchangeable, is not of a past, but only of a passing world which lies in essential truth in nature, material or spiritual, the truth of actual reality, and the truth of imaginative reality...

"Many of these tales are of the grey wandering wave of the West, and through each goes the wind of the Gaelic spirit, which everywhere desires infinitude, but in the penury of things as they are turns upon itself to the dim enchantment of dreams. And what are these, whether of a single heart on the braes of sorrow or of the weariness of unnumbered minds in the maze of time and fate, but the dreams of the wavering images of dreams, with which for a thousand years the Gael has met the

ignominies and sorrows of a tragical destiny; the intangible merchandise which he continually creates and continually throws away, as the May wind gathers and scatters the gold of the broom."

*Elizabeth A. Sharp.*

# PHARAIS

## A ROMANCE OF THE ISLES

**"Mithich domh triall gu tigh Pharais."**

**(It is time for me to go up unto the House of Paradise.) Muireadhach Albannach**

**"How many beautiful things have come to us from Pharais." "Bileag-na-Toscùil."**

**To**

**E. W. R**

*Dear friend, – While you gratify me by your pleasure in this inscription, you modestly deprecate the dedication to you of this story of alien life – of that unfamiliar island-life so alien in all ways from the life of cities, and, let me add, from that of the great mass of the nation to which, in the communal sense, we both belong. But in the Domhan-Tòir of friendship there are resting-places where all barriers of race, training, and circumstance fall away in dust. At one of these places of peace we met, a long while ago, and found that we loved the same things, and in the same way. You have been in the charmed West yourself; have seen the gloom and shine of the mountains that throw their shadow on the sea: have heard the wave whisper along that haunted shore which none loves save with passion, and none, loving, can bear to be long parted from. You, unlike so many who delight only in the magic of sunshine and cloud, love this dear land when the mists drive across the hillsides, and the brown torrents are in spate, and the rain and the black wind make a gloom upon every loch, and fill with the dusk of storm every strath, and glen, and corrie. Not otherwise can one love it aright: "Tir nam Beann s'nan gleann' s'nan ghaisgach," as one of our ancient poets calls it – "The land of hills, and glens, and heroes." You, too, like Deirdre of old, have looked back on "Alba," and, finding it passing fair and dear, have, with the Celtic Helen, said in your heart—*

Inmain tir in tir ud thoir,  
Alba cona lingantaibh!  
*'Belovéd is that eastern land,  
Alba of the lochs."*

*In the mythology of the Gael are three forgotten deities, children of Delbaith-Dana. These are Seithoir, Teithoir, and Keithoir. One dwells throughout the sea, and beneath the soles of the feet of another are the highest clouds; and these two may be held sacred for the beauty they weave for the joy of eye and ear. But now that, as surely none may gainsay, Keithoir is blind and weary, let us worship at his fane rather than give all our homage to the others. For Keithoir is the god of the earth; dark-*

*eyed, shadowy brother of Pan; and his fane is among the lonely glens and mountains and lonelier isles of "Alba cona lingantaibh." It is because you and I are of the children of Keithoir that I wished to grace my book with your name.*

*The most nature-wrought of the English poets hoped he was not too late in transmuting into his own verse something of the beautiful mythology of Greece. But while Keats spun from the inexhaustible loom of genius, and I am but an obscure chronicler of obscure things, is it too presumptuous of me to hope that here, and mayhap elsewhere, I, the latest comer among older and worthier celebrants and co-enthusiasts, likewise may do something, howsoever little, to win a further measure of heed for, and more intimate sympathy with, that old charm and stellar beauty of Celtic thought and imagination, now, alas, like so many other lovely things, growing more and more remote, discoverable seldom in books, and elusive amid the sayings and oral legends and fragmentary songs of a passing race?*

*A passing race: and yet, mayhap not so. Change is inevitable; and even if we could hear the wind blowing along Magh Mell – the Plain of Honey – we might list to a new note, bitter-sweet: and, doubtless, the waves falling over the green roof of Tir-na-Thonn' murmur drowsily of a shifting of the veils of circumstance, which Keithoir weaves blindly in his dark place. But what was, surely is; and what is, surely may yet be. The form changes; the essential abides. As the saying goes among the isle-folk: The shadow fleets beneath the cloud driven by the wind, and the cloud falls in rain or is sucked of the sun, but the wind sways this way and that for ever. It may well be that the Celtic Dream is not doomed to become a memory merely. Were it so, there would be less joy in all Springs to come, less hope in all brown Autumns; and the cold of a deathlier chill in all Winters still dreaming by the Pole. For the Celtic joy in the life of Nature – the Celtic vision – is a thing apart: it is a passion; a visionary rapture. There is none like it among the peoples of our race.*

*Meanwhile, there are a few remote spots, as yet inviolate. Here, Anima Celtica still lives and breathes and hath her being. She dreams: but if she awake, it may not necessarily be to a deepening twilight, or to a forlorn passage to Tir Tairngire – that Land of Promise whose borders shine with the loveliness of all forfeited, or lost, or banished dreams and realities of Beauty. It may be that she will arise to a wider sway, over a disfrontiered realm. Blue are the hills that are far from us. Dear saying of the Gael, whose soul as well as whose heart speaks therein. Far hills recede, recede! Dim veils of blue, woven from within and without, haunt us, allure us, always, always!*

*But now, before I send you my last word of greeting, let me add (rather for other readers than for you, who already know of them) a word concerning the Gaelic runes interpolated in Pharais.<sup>1</sup>*

*The "Urnuigh Smalaidh an Teine" (p. 42) and "Au t Altachadh Leapa" (p. 43) —respectively a prayer to be said at covering up the peat-fire at bed-time and a Rest-blessing – are relics of ancient Celtic folklore which were sent to the Rev. Dr. Alexander Stewart, of "Nether Lochaber" fame, by Mr. A. A. Carmichael, of South Uist, who took them down from the recitation of a man living at Iocar of Uist. From the same Hebridean source came the "Rann Buacbailleac," or rune to be said over cattle when led to pasture at morn, introduced at p. 49. The English versions, by Dr. Stewart, appeared first in "The Inverness Courier," over twenty years ago. There are several versions current of the authentic incident of the innocent old woman held to be a witch, and of her prayer. I weave into my story the episode as I heard it many years ago, though with the rune rescued from oblivion by Dr. Stewart, rather than with the longer and commonly corrupted version still to be heard by the croft-fire in many localities, all "the far cry" from the Ord of Sutherland to the Rhinns of Islay. The "Laoidh Mhnathan" —the Chant of Women, at p. 100 – is not ancient in the actual form here given, which is from an unpublished volume of "Oràin' Spioradail."*

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<sup>1</sup> A slightly anglicised lection of the Gaelic word Pàras = Paradise, Heaven. "Pharais," properly, is the genitive and dative case of Pàras, as in the line from Muireadhach Albannach, quoted after the title page. "Mithich domh triall gu tigh Pharais" – "It is time for me to go up unto the House of Paradise."

*The sweetest-voiced of the younger Irish singers of to-day has spoken of the Celtic Twilight. A twilight it is; but, if night follow gloaming, so also does dawn succeed night. Meanwhile, twilight voices are sweet, if faint and far, and linger lovingly in the ear.*

*There is another Pàras than that seen of Alastair of Innisròn – the Tir-Nan-Oigh of friendship. Therein we both have seen beautiful visions and dreamed dreams. Take, then, out of my heart, this book of vision and dream.*

*Fiona Macleod.*

"O bileag-geal,  
O bileag-na-Toscùil, bileag Pharais,  
O tha e boidheach!  
Tha e boidheach!"

## Pharais

### I

It was midway in the seventh month of her great joy that the child moved, while a rapture leaped to her heart, within the womb of Lora, daughter of the dead Norman Maclean, minister of Innisròn, in the Outer Isles.

On the same eve the cruel sorrow came to her that had lain waiting in the dark place beyond the sunrise.

Alastair, her so dearly beloved, had gone, three days earlier, by the Western Isles steamer, to the port of Greenock, thence to fare to Glasgow, to learn from a great professor of medicine concerning that which so troubled him – both by reason of what the islesmen whispered among themselves, and for what he felt of his own secret pain and apprehension.

There was a rocky spur on Innisròn, whence the watcher could scan the headland round which the *Clansman* would come on her thrice-weekly voyage: in summer, while the isles were still steeped in the yellow shine; in autumn, when the sky seaward was purple, and every boulder in each islet was as transparent amber amid a vapour of amethyst rising from bases and hollow caverns of a cold day-dawn blue.

Hither Lora had come in the wane of the afternoon. The airs were as gentle and of as sweet balmy breath as though it were Summer-sleep rather than only the extreme of May. The girl looked, shading her eyes, seaward; and saw the blue of the midmost sky laid as a benediction upon the face of the deep, but paler by a little, as the darkest turquoise is pale beside the lightest sapphire. She lifted her eyes from the pearl-blue of the horizon to the heart of the zenith, and saw there the soul of Ocean gloriously arisen. Beneath the weedy slabs of rock whereon she stood, the green of the sea-moss lent a yellow gleam to the slow-waving dead-man's-hair which the tide laved to and fro sleepily, as though the bewitched cattle of Seumas the seer were drowsing there unseen, known only of their waving tails, swinging silently as the bulls dreamed of the hill-pastures they should see no more. Yellow-green in the sunlit spaces as the sea-hair was, it was dark against the shifting green light of the water under the rocks, and till so far out as the moving blue encroached.

To Lora's right ran a curved inlet, ending in a pool fringed with dappled fronds of sea-fern, mare's-tails, and intricate bladder-wrack. In the clear hollow were visible the wave-worn stones at the bottom, many crowned with spreading anemones, with here and there a star-fish motionlessly agleam, or a cloud of vanishing shrimps above the patches of sand, or hermit crabs toiling cumbrously from perilous shelter to more sure havens. Looking down she saw herself, as though her wraith had suddenly crept therein and was waiting to whisper that which, once uttered and once heard, would mean disunion no more.

Slipping softly to her knees, she crouched over the pool. Long and dreamily she gazed into its depths. What was this phantasm, she wondered, that lay there in the green-gloom as though awaiting her? Was it, in truth, the real Lora, and she but the wraith?

How strangely expressionless was that pale face, looking upward with so straightforward a mien, yet with so stealthy an understanding, with dark abysmal eyes filled with secrecy and dread, if not, indeed, with something of menace.

A thrill of fear went to the girl's heart. A mass of shadow had suddenly obscured her image in the water. Her swift fancy suggested that her wraith had abruptly shrouded herself, fearful of revelation. The next moment she realised that her own wealth of dark hair had fallen down her neck and upon her shoulders – hair dusky as twilight, but interwrought with threads of bronze that, in the shine of fire or sun, made an evasive golden gleam.

She shuddered as she perceived the eyes of her other self intently watching her through that cloudy shadow. A breath came from the pool, salt and shrewd, and cold as though arisen from those sea-sepulchres whence the fish steal their scales of gold and silver. A thin voice was in her ears that was not the lap of the tide or the cluck of water gurgling in and out of holes and crannies.

With a startled gesture she shrank back.

"What is it? What is it?" she cried; but the sound of her own awed voice broke the spell: and almost at the same moment an eddy of wind came circling over the rock-bastions of the isle, and, passing as a tremulous hand over the pool, ruffled it into a sudden silvery sheen.

With a blithe laugh, Lora rose to her feet. The sunlight dwelt about her as though she were the sweetest flower in that lost garden of Aodh the poet, where the streams are unspanned rainbows flowing to the skyey cauldrons below the four quarters, and where every white flower has at dusk a voice, a whisper, of surpassing sweetness.

"O Alastair, Alastair!" she cried, "will the boat never be coming that is to bring you back to me!"

Not a black spot anywhere, of wherry or steamer, caught the leaping gaze. Like a bird it moved across the sea, and found no object whereon to alight.

The *Clansman* was often late; but her smoke could be seen across Dunmore Head nigh upon quarter of an hour before her prow combed the froth from the Sound.

With a sigh, the girl moved slowly back by the way she had come. Over and over, as she went, she sang, crooningly, lines from a sweet song of the Gael, *O, Till, a Leannain!*

As she passed a place of birchen undergrowth and tall bracken, she did not see an old man, seated, grey and motionless as a heron. He looked at her with the dull eyes of age, though there was pity in them and something of a bewildered awe.

"Ay," he muttered below his breath, "though ye sing for your dear one to return, ye know not what I know. Have I not had the vision of him with the mist growin' up an' up, an' seen the green grass turn to black mools at his feet?"

Lora, unwitting, passed; and he heard her voice wax and wane, as falling water in a glen where the baffled wind among the trees soughs now this way and now that: —

"*Mo chridhe-sa! 's tusa 'bhios truagh, 'bhios truagh, Mur pill is' 'thog oirre gu cluaidh, gu cluaidh!*"

She went past the boulder on the path that hid the clachan from view, and within a net-throw of which was the byre of Mrs. Maclean's cottage, where, since her father's death, she had dwelt.

A tall, gaunt, elderly woman, with hair of the ivory white of the snowberry, was about to pass from behind the byre with a burthen of fresh bracken for Ian Maclean's bed – for the old islesman abode by the way of his fathers, and was content to sleep on a deerskin spread upon fresh-gathered fern – when she caught sight of Lora. She stopped, and with an eager glance looked at the girl: then beyond, and finally seaward, with her long, thin, brown arm at an angle, and her hand curved over her eyes against the glare of the water.

Silence was about her as a garment. Every motion of her, even, suggested a deep calm. Mrs. Maclean spoke seldom, and when she said aught it was in a low voice, sweet and serene, but as though it came from a distance and in the twilight. She was of the shadow, as the islesmen say; and strangers thought her to be austere in look and manner, though that was only because she gazed long before she replied to one foreign to her and her life: having the Gaelic, too, so much more natively than the English, that oftentimes she had to translate the one speech into the other nearer to her: that, and also because the quiet of the sea was upon her, as often with hill-folk there is a hushed voice and mien.

Lora knew what was in her mind when she saw her gaze go seaward and then sweep hither and thither like a hawk ere it settles.

"The boat is not yet in sight, Mary; she is late," she said simply: adding immediately, "I have come back to go up Cnoc-an-Iolair; from there I'll see the smoke of the *Clansman* sooner. She is often as late as this."

Mrs. Maclean looked compassionately at the girl.

"Mayhap the *Clansman* will not be coming this way at all to-night, Lora. She may be going by Kyle-na-Sith."

A flush came into Lora's face. Her eyes darkened, as a tarn under rain.

"And for why should she not be sailing this way to-night, when Alastair is coming home, and is to be here before sundown?"

"He may have been unable to leave. If he does not come to-day, he will doubtless be here to-morrow."

"To-morrow! O Mary, Mary, have you ever loved, that you can speak like that? Think what Alastair went away for! Surely you do not know how the pain is at my heart?"

"Truly, *mùirnean*. But it is not well to be sure of that which may easily happen otherwise."

"To-morrow, indeed! Why, Mary, if the *Clansman* does not come by this evening, and has gone as you say by Kyle-na-Sith, she will not be here again till the day *after* to-morrow!"

"Alastair could come by the other way, by the Inverary boat, and thence by the herring-steamer from Dunmore, after he had reached it from Uan Point or by way of Craig-Sionnach."

"That may be, of course; but I think not. I cannot believe the boat will not be here to-night."

Both stood motionless, with their hands shading their eyes, and looking across the wide Sound, where the tide bubbled and foamed against the slight easterly wind-drift. The late sunlight fell full upon them, working its miracle of gold here and there, and making the skin like a flower. The outline of each figure stood out darkly clear as against a screen of amber.

For a time neither spoke. At last, with a faint sigh, Mrs. Maclean turned.

"Did you see Ian on your way, *Lora-mo-ghràidh*?"

"No."

"Do not have speech with the old man to-night, dear one. He is not himself."

"Has he had the sight again?"

"Ay, Lora."

Again a silence fell. The girl stood moodily, with her eyes on the ground: the elder watched her with a steadfast, questioning look.

"Mary!"

Mrs. Maclean made no reply, but her eyes brought Lora's there with the answer that was in them.

"Ian has never had the sight again upon ... upon Alastair, has he?"

"How can I say?"

"But do you know if he has? If you do not tell me, I will ask him."

"I asked him that only yester-morning. He shook his head."

"Do you believe he can foresee all that is to happen?"

"No. Those who have the vision do not read all that is in the future. Only God knows. They can see the thing of peril, ay, and the evil of accident, and even Death – and what is more, the nearness and sometimes the way of it. But no man sees more than this – unless, indeed, he has been to Tir-na-h'Oigh."

Mrs. Maclean spoke the last words almost in a whisper, and as though she said them in a dream.

"Unless he has been to Tir-na-h'Oigh, Mary?"

"So it is said. Our people believe that the Land of Eternal Youth lies far yonder across the sea; but Aodh, the poet, is right when he tells us that that land is lapped by no green waves such as we know here, and that those who go thither do so in sleep, or in vision, or when God has filled with dusk the house of the brain."

"And when a man has been to Tir-na-h'Oigh in sleep, or in dream, or in mind-dark, does he see there what shall soon happen here?"

"It is said."

"Has Ian been beyond the West?"

"No."

"Then what he sees when he has the sight upon him is not *beannaichte*: is not a thing out of heaven?"

"I cannot say. I think not."

"Mary, is it the truth you are now telling me?"

A troubled expression came into the woman's face, but she did not answer.

"And is it the truth, Mary, that Ian has not had the sight upon Alastair since he went away – that he did not have it last night or this morning?"

Lora leaned forward in her anxiety. She saw that in her companion's eyes which gave her the fear. But the next moment Mrs. Maclean smiled.

"I too have the sight, *Lora-mo-ghràidh*; and shall I be telling you that which it will be giving you joy to hear?"

"Ay, surely, Mary!"

"Then I think you will soon be in the arms of him you love" – and, with a low laugh, she pointed across the sea to where a film of blue-grey smoke rose over the ridge of Dunmore headland.

"Ah, the *Clansman*!" cried Lora, with a gasp of joy: and the next moment she was moving down the path again toward the little promontory.

The wind had risen slightly. The splash, splash, of the sunny green waves against each other, the lapping of the blue water upon the ledges to the east, the stealthy whisper where the emerald-green tide-flow slipped under the hollowed sandstone, the spurtle of the sea-wrack, the flashing fall and foam-send of the gannets, the cries of the gulls, the slap of wind as it came over the forehead of the isle and struck the sea a score of fathoms outward – all gave her a sense of happiness. The world seemed suddenly to have grown young. The exultant Celtic joy stood over against the brooding Celtic shadow, and believed the lances of the sunlight could keep at bay all the battalions of gloom.

The breeze was variable, for the weft of blue smoke which suddenly curled round the bend of Dunmore had its tresses blown seaward, though where Lora stood the wind came from the west, and even caused a white foam along the hither marge of the promontory.

With eager eyes she watched the vessel round the point. After all, it was just possible she might not be the *Clansman*.

But the last sunglow shone full against Dunmore and upon the bows of the steamer as she swung to the helm; and the moment the red funnel changed from a dusky russet into a flame of red, Lora's new anxiety was assuaged. She knew every line of the boat, and already she felt Alastair's kisses on her lips. The usual long summer-gloaming darkened swiftly; for faint films of coming change were being woven across the span of the sky from mainland oceanward. Even as the watcher on Innisròn stood, leaning forward in her eager outlook, she saw the extreme of the light lift upward as though it were the indrawn shaft of a fan. The contours of the steamer grew confused: a velvety duskiness overspread Dunmore foreland.

The sky overhead had become a vast lift of perishing yellow – a spent wave of daffodil by the north and by the south; westward, of lemon, deepening into a luminous orange glow shot with gold and crimson, and rising as an exhalation from hollow cloud-sepulchres of amethyst, straits of scarlet, and immeasurable spaces of dove-grey filled with shallows of the most pale sea-green.

Lora stood as though wrought in marble. She had seen that which made the blood leap from her heart, and surge in her ears, and clamour against her brain.

No pennon flew at the peak of the steamer's foremast. This meant there was neither passenger nor freight to be landed at Innisròn, so that there was no need for the ferry.

She could scarcely believe it possible that the *Clansman* could come, after all, and yet not bring Alastair back to her. It seemed absurd: some ill-timed by-play; nay, a wanton cruelty. There must be some mistake, she thought, as she peered hungrily into the sea-dusk.

Surely the steamer was heading too much to the northward! With a cry, Lora instinctively stretched her arms toward the distant vessel; but no sound came from her lips, for at that moment a spurt of yellow flame rent the gray gloom, as a lantern was swung aloft to the mast-head.

In a few seconds she would know all; for whenever the *Clansman* was too late for her flag-signal to be easily seen, she showed a green light a foot or so beneath the yellow.

Lora heard the heavy pulse of the engines, the churn of the beaten waves, even the delirious surge and suction as the spent water was driven along the hull and poured over and against the helm ere it was swept into the wake that glimmered white as a snow-wreath. So wrought was she that, at the same time, she was keenly conscious of the rapid *tweet-tweet-tweet-tweet-tweet* – *o-o-h sweet!* – *sweet!* of a yellow-hammer among the whin close by, and of the strange, mournful cry of an oyster-opener as it flew with devious swoops toward some twilight eyrie.

The throb of the engines – the churn of the beaten waves – the sough of the swirling yeast – even the churning, swirling, under-tumult, and through it and over it the heavy pulse, the deep panting rhythmic throb: this she heard, as it were the wrought surge of her own blood.

Would the green light never swing up to that yellow beacon?

A minute passed: two minutes: three! It was clear that the steamer had no need to call at Innisròn. She was coming up the mid of the Sound, and, unless the ferry-light signalled to her to draw near, she would keep her course north-westward.

Suddenly Lora realised this. At the same time there flashed into her mind the idea that perhaps Alastair was on board after all, but that he was ill, and had forgotten to tell the captain of his wish to land by the island ferry.

She turned, and, forgetful or heedless of her condition, moved swiftly from ledge to ledge, and thence by the path to where, in the cove beyond the clachan, the ferry-boat lay on the tide-swell, moored by a rope fastened to an iron clank fixed in a boulder.

"Ian! Ian!" she cried, as she neared the cove; but at first she saw no one, save Mrs. Maclean, black against the fire-glow from her cottage. "Ian! Ian!"

A dark figure rose from beside the ferry-shed.

"Is that you, Ian? *Am bheil am bhàta deas?* Is the boat ready? *Bi ealamh! bi ealamh! mach am bhàta:* quick! quick! out with the boat!"

In her eager haste she spoke both in the Gaelic and the English: nor did she notice that the old man did not answer her, or make any sign of doing as she bade him.

"*Oh, Ian, bi ealamh! bi ealamh! Faigh am bhàta deas! rach a stigh do'n bhàta!*"

Word for word, as is the wont of the people, he answered her: —

"Why is it that I should be quick? Why should I be getting the boat ready? For what should I be going into the boat?"

"The *Clansman*! Do you not see her? *Bi ealamh; bi ealamh!* or she will go past us like a dream."

"She has flown no flag, she has no green light at the mast. No one will be coming ashore, and no freight; and there is no freight to go from here, and no one who wants the ferry unless it be yourself, *Lora nighean Tormaid!*"

"Alastair is there: he was to come by the steamer to-day! Be quick, Ian! Do you hear me?"

"I hear," said the old man, as he slowly moved toward the boulder to his left, unloosed the rope from the iron clank, and drew the boat into the deep water alongside the landing-ledge.

"There is no good in going out, *Lora bhàn!* The wind is rising: ay, I tell you, the wind goes high: we may soon hear the howling of the sea-dogs."

But Lora, taking no notice, had sprung into the boat, and was already adjusting the long oars to the old-fashioned wooden thole-pins. Ian followed, grumblingly repeating, "*Tha gaoth ruhòr am! Tha coltas stairm' air!*"

Once, however, that the wash of the sea caught the wherry, and the shrewd air sent the salt against their faces, the old man appeared to realise that the girl was in earnest. Standing, he laid

hold of the sloped mast, to steady himself against the swaying as the tide sucked at the keel and the short waves slapped against the bows, and then gave a quick calculating glance seaward and at the advancing steamer.

Rapidly he gave his directions to Lora to take the helm and to keep the boat to windward:

"*Gabh an stiuir, Lora: cum ris a' ghàoth i!*"

The next moment the long oars were moving slowly, but powerfully, through the water, and the ferry-boat drove into the open, and there lay over a little with the double swing of wind and tide.

The gloaming was now heavy upon the sea; for a mist had come up with the dipping of the sun, and thickened the dusk.

Suddenly Ian called to Lora to hold the oars. As soon as she had caught them, and was steadying the boat in the cross surge of the water, he lifted a lantern from under the narrow fore-deck, lighted the wick below the seat (after the wind had twice blown the flame into the dark), and then, gripping the mast, waved the signal to and fro overhead.

It was well he thought of this, for the steamer was going at full speed, and would not have slackened.

In a few minutes thereafter the heavy stertorous throb and splash was close by them, while the screw revolved now at quarter-speed.

A hoarse voice came from the *Clansman*:

"Ferry ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, ta ferry she will pe," called back Ian in the quaint English of which he was so proud: though he thought the language a poor, thin speech, and fit only for folk who never left the mainland.

"What are ye oot for, Ian? Ha' ye ony body comin' aboard?"

"We've come out for Mr. Alastair Macleod," Lora broke in eagerly: "we've come to take him off."

"Hoots, my girl, what for d'ye fash yersel an' us too for the like o' sic havers. There's no one aboard who wants to land at Innisròn: an' as for Alastair Macleod, he was na' on the *Clansman* when we left Greenock, so he could na' well be on her the now! As for you, Ian Maclean, are ye doited, when, wi' neither flag nor green light aloft, ye stop the steamer like this, a' for a lassie's haverin'! Ye'll hear o' this yet, my man, I'se telling ye! Auld fule that ye are, awa' wi' ye! keep aff the wash o' the steamer: ... an' by the Lord, I'll ..."

But already the *Clansman* was forging ahead, and the second-officer's menace was swallowed up in the tumult of churned seas.

A minute later the steamer was a dark mass to the nor'-west, with a sheet of white writhing after her, and a swirl of flaming cinders from her funnel riding down the night like a shoal of witch-lights.

The wherry rocked heavily, caught as she was in the surge from the screw, and lying adrift in the sliding hollows and rough criss-cross of the waves.

Lora sat motionless and speechless. The old man stared down into the darkness of the boat: but though his lips moved continuously, no sound came from them.

For a time it was as though a derelict were the sport of the sea, which had a dull moan in it, that partly was from the stifled voice of the tide as it forced its way from the cauldrons of the deep, and partly from the fugitive clamour of breaking waves, and mostly from the now muffled, now loud and raucous sough of the wind as it swung low by the surge, or trailed off above the highest reach of the flying scud.

At last, in a whisper, the girl spoke.

"Ian, has aught of evil come to Alastair?"

"God forbid!"

"Do you know anything to his undoing?"

"No, *Lora bhàn*."

"You have not had the sight upon him lately?"

The islesman hesitated a moment. Raising his eyes at last, he glanced first at his companion and then out into the dusk across the waves, as though he expected to see some one or something there in answer to his quest.

"I dreamt a dream, Lora, wife of Alastair. I saw you and him and another go away into a strange place. You and the other were as shadows; but Alastair was a man, as now, though he walked through mist, and I saw nothing of him but from the waist upward."

Silence followed this, save for the wash of the sea, the moan of wind athwart wave, and the soft rush of the breeze overhead.

Ian rose, and made as though he were going to put out the oars; but as he saw how far the boat had drifted from the shore, and what a jumble of water lay between them and the isle, he busied himself with hoisting the patched brown sail.

As if no interval had occurred, Lora abruptly called him by name.

"Ian," she added, "what does the mist mean? ... the mist that you saw about the feet and up to the waist of Alastair?"

There was no reply. Ian let go the sail, secured it, and then seated himself a few feet away from Lora.

She repeated the question: but the old man was obstinately silent, nor did he speak word of any kind till the wherry suddenly slackened, as she slipped under the lee of the little promontory of the landing-place.

"The tide will be on turning now," he exclaimed in his awkward English, chosen at the moment because he did not dare to speak in the Gaelic, fearful as he was of having any further word with his companion; "and see, after all, the wind she will soon pe gone."

Lora, who had mechanically steered the boat to its haven, still sat in the stern, though Ian had stepped on to the ledge and was holding the gunwale close to it so that she might step ashore with ease. She looked at him as though she did not understand. The old man shifted uneasily. Then his conscience smote him for having used the cold, unfriendly English instead of the Gaelic so dear to them both: for was not the girl in the shadow of trouble, and did he not foresee for her more trouble to come? So, in a gentle, apologetic voice, he repeated in Gaelic what he had said about the tide and the wind:

*"Thill an sruth: Dh' fhalbh a' ghàoth."*

"There will be peace to-night," he added. "It was but a sunset breeze, after all. There will be no storm. I think now there will be a calm. It will be bad for the herring-boats. It is a long pull and a hard pull when the water sleeps against the keel. A dark night, too, most likely."

Lora rose, and slowly stepped on shore. She took no notice of Ian's sudden garrulity. She did not seem to see him even.

He looked at her with momentary resentment: but almost simultaneously a pitiful light came into his eyes.

"He will be here to-morrow," he murmured, "and if not, then next day for sure."

Lora moved up the ledge in silence.

In the middle of the cove she stopped, waved her hand, and, in a dull voice bidding good-night, wished sound sleep to him:

*"Beannachd leibh! Cadal math dhiubh!"*

Ian answered simply, "*Beannachd leibh!*" and turned to fasten the rope to the iron clamp.

The dew was heavy, even on the rough salt spear-grass which fringed the sand above the cove. On the short sheep-grass, on the rocky soil beyond, it was dense, and shone white as a shroud in a dark room. A bat swung this way and that, whirling silently. The fall of the wind still sighed in the bent rowan trees to the west of the clachan, where the pathway diverged from the shore. Against the bluff of Cnoc-an-Iolair it swelled intermittently: its voice in the hollows and crevices of the crag broken up in moans and short gasps, fainter and fainter.

Lora noted all this wearily as she advanced. She was conscious, also, of the nibbling of the sheep, quenching their thirst with the wet grass: of the faint swish of her feet going through the dew: of the dark track, like a crack in black ice, made wherever she walked in the glisten. But though she saw and unwittingly noted, her thoughts were all with Alastair and with what had kept him.

In her remote life there was scarce room for merely ordinary vicissitudes. It was not a thing to ponder as ominous that one should go out to sea after herring or mackerel and not return that night or the morrow, or even by the next gloaming, or second dawn; or that a man should go up among the hills and not come back for long after his expected hour. But that one could miss the great steamer was a thing scarce to believe in. To Lora, who had been so little on the mainland, and whose only first-hand knowledge of the feverish life of towns was derived from her one winter of school-life at Rothesay and brief visits to Greenock and Oban, it was difficult to realise how any one could fail to leave by the steamer, unless ill or prevented by some serious mischance. The periodical coming of the *Clansman* symbolised for her, to a certain extent, the inevitable march of time and fate. To go or come by that steam-driven, wind-heedless vessel was to be above the uncertainties and vicissitudes to which ordinary wayfaring mortals are subject. The girl thought she knew so much that to her all of what town-life meant must be bare, because of her reading: knowing not that, with a woman whose heart aches, a tear will drown every word writ in any book, a sigh scatter the leaves into nothingness.

Deep was the puzzle to her as she slowly ascended the path which led to Mary Maclean's cottage. She stopped once or twice, half unconsciously, to smell the fragrance of the bog-myrtle where the gale grew in tufts out of the damper patches, or of the thyme as it was crushed under her feet and made over-sweet, over-poignant by the dew.

The peat-reek reached her nostrils from the cottage, blent with the breaths of the cows that still loitered afoot, munching the cool wilding fodder. Her gaze, too, fell upon the fire-lit interior, with a table overspread by a white cloth, flushed by the glow that wavered from betwixt the red-hot bars; and, later, upon the figure of Mrs. Maclean, who had come out to meet her, or, more likely, had been there ever since the ferry-boat had gone off upon its useless errand.

"Are you wet, Lora? Are you cold?" she asked, as the girl drew near. There was no need to say aught of the bitter disappointment, any more than to speak of the glooming of the dusk: both were obvious facts beyond the yea or nay of speech.

"I am very tired, Mary."

"Come in, dear, and have your tea. It will do you good. *Lora-mo-ghràidh*, you should not have gone out in the ferry-boat. It was no use, and the sea was rough, and you might have come to harm; and what would Alastair Macleod be saying, to-morrow, if he found his heart's-delight ill, and that I had stood by and seen her do so foolish a thing?"

"Oh, Mary, do you really think he will be here to-morrow?"

"Surely."

"But I fear he will wait now till the next sailing of the *Clansman*."

"We cannot say. Come in, my fawn, out of the chill."

"It is going to be a lovely night. The wind falls fast; even now it is almost still. The purple peace will be upon everything to-night. I am restless: I do not wish to go indoors."

"No, no, Lora dear to me! Come in and have your tea, and then rest. You can rise at daybreak, if you will, and go round the island, lest he should be coming in any of the herring-smacks."

"I want to speak to Ian."

"Ian has gone across to Ivor Maquay's; he will not be here to-night."

Lora looked suspiciously at the speaker. Had she not left Ian a few minutes ago, and was he not even now following her? She stared about her, but saw no one. In the gloaming she could just descry the black mass of the wherry. Ian was nowhere visible. She did not think of scrutinising the shadow of the beached and long disused coble which lay a few yards away. Had she done so, she might have perceived the old islesman standing rigid. He had overheard his kinswoman, and understood. As soon

as the two women had entered the cottage, he moved swiftly and silently away, and, traversing the clachan, was soon swallowed up of the darkness.

After the meal was ended, Lora found herself overworn with excitement. All wish to go out again went from her. From where she lay resting, she watched Mrs. Maclean put away the things and then seat herself by the fire.

For a long time neither woman spoke. A drowsy peace abode upon the threshold.

The hot red glow of the peats shone steadily.

At first there had been a little lamp on the table, but after a time Mrs. Maclean had extinguished it. Instead, she had thrown upon the fire a log of pinewood. The dry crackle, the spurt of the sap as it simmered in the heat, the yellow tongues and sudden red fangs and blue flames, gave the sound and glow whereof a sweeter silence can be wrought into what has been but stillness before.

An hour went by. With brief snatches of talk, all made up of fears and hopes, another hour passed. Then a long quietness again, broken at the last by a low crooning song from the elder woman, as she leaned to the fire and stared absently into its heart. The song was old: older than the oldest things, save the summits of the mountains, the granite isles, and the brooding pain of the sea. Long ago it had been sung by wild Celtic voices, before ever spoken word was writ in letters – before that again, mayhap, and caught perhaps from a wailing Pictish mother – so ancient was the moving old-world strain, so antique the words of the lullaby that was dim with age when it soothed to sleep the child Ossian, son of Fingal.

When the crooning died away, Lora slept. With soft step Mrs. Maclean moved across the room, and lightly dropped a plaid over the girl's figure, recumbent in beautiful ease upon the low bed-couch.

She returned slowly to her place by the fire. After a while she was about to seat herself, when she started violently. Surely that was a face pressed for a moment against the window?

With a strange look in her eyes, she reproved herself for her nervous folly. She sat down, with gaze resolutely fixed on the glowing peats: nor would she have stirred again, but for a sound as of a low moan.

The blood ran chill in her veins; her mouth twitched; and the intertisted fingers of her hands were white and lifeless with the fierce grip that came of her fear.

But she was not a woman to be mastered by terror. With a quivering sigh she rose, looked round the room, forced herself to stare fixedly at the window, and then moved quietly to the door.

As soon as she felt the air upon her brows she became calm, and all dread left her.

"Is that you, Ian?" she whispered.

There was no one visible; no sound.

"Is that you, Alastair Macleod?"

So low was the utterance that, if any one had been there, he could scarce have heard it.

To her strained ears it was as though she heard a light susurrus of brushed dew: but it might be a wandering breath of air among the gale, or an adder moving through the grass, or a fern-owl hawking under the rowan-trees.

She waited a little; then, with a sigh of relief, re-entered the cottage and closed the door.

A glance at Lora showed her that the girl was sleeping unperturbed. For some time there after she sat by the fire, brooding over many things. Weary, at last, she rose, cast a farewell glance at the sleeper, and then slipped quietly to her bed in the adjoining room.

Night lay passively upon the sea, upon the isle, upon the clachan. Not a light lingered in any cottage, save the fire-glow in that of Mary Maclean: a hollow, attenuating beam that stared through the dark unwaveringly.

Neither star nor moon was visible. The clouds hung low, but without imminence of rain for the isles, drawn inland as the vapours were by the foreheads of the bens.

An hour later the door of the cottage opened and closed again, silently. It was Lora who came forth.

She walked hesitatingly at first, and then more swiftly, not pausing till she reached the little boulder-pier. There she stood motionless, listening intently.

The water lapped among the hollows, above which the ebb-left shellfish gaped thirstily. There was a lift among the dulse-heaps, as though a finger stirred them and let loose their keen salt smells. The bladder-wrack moved with strange noises, sometimes startlingly loud, oftenest as if sea-things were being stifled or strangled.

From the promontory came a cry: abrupt, strident – the hunger-note of a skua. The thin pipe of the dotterel fell into the darkness beyond the shallows where the sea-mist lay. In the Kyle a muffled, stertorous breath, near and twice as far away, told that two whales were in the wake of the mackerel.

From the isle, no sound. The sheep lay on the thyme, or among the bracken, still as white boulders. The kye crouched, with misty nostrils laid low to the damp grass, rough with tangled gale. The dogs were silent. Even the tufted canna hung straight and motionless. The white moths had, one by one, fallen like a fallen feather. The wind-death lay upon all: at the last, too, upon the sea.

## II

Slowly, as though a veil were withdrawn, the cloudy dusk passed from the lift. The moon, lying in violet shadow, grew golden: while the sheen of her pathway, trailed waveringly across the sea and athwart the isle, made Innisròn seem as a beautiful body motionlessly adrift on the deep.

One by one the stars came forth – solemn eyes watching for ever the white procession move onward orderly where there is neither height, nor depth, nor beginning, nor end.

In the vast stellar space the moon-glow waned until it grew cold, white, ineffably remote. Only upon our little dusky earth, upon our restless span of waters, the light descended in a tender warmth. Drifting upon the sea, it moved tremulously onward, weaving the dark waters into a weft of living beauty.

Strange murmur of ocean, even when deep calm prevails, and not the most homeless wind lifts a weary wing from wave-gulf to wave-gulf. As a voice heard in dream; as a whisper in the twilight of one's own soul; as a breath, as a sigh from one knows not whence, heard suddenly and with recognising awe; so is this obscure, troublous echo of a tumult that is over, that is not, but that may be, that awaiteth.

To Lora it was almost inaudible. Rather, her ears held no other sound than the babbling repetitive chime and whisper of the lip of the sea moving to and fro the pebbles on the narrow strand just beyond her.

Her eyes saw the lift of the dark, the lovely advance of the lunar twilight, the miracle of the yellow bloom – golden here and here white as frost-fire – upon sea and land: they saw, and yet saw not. Her ears heard the muffled voice of ocean and the sweet recurrent whispering of the foam-white runnels beside her: they heard, and yet heard not.

Surely, in the darkness, in the loneliness, she would have knowledge of Alastair. Surely, she thought, he would come to her in the spirit. In deep love there is a living invisible line from soul to soul whereby portent of joy or disaster, or passion of loneliness, or passion of fear, or passion of longing may be conveyed with terrifying surety.

How beyond words dreadful was this remoteness which environed her, as the vast dome of night to a single white flower growing solitary in a waste place.

Inland upon the isle, seaward, skyward, Lora looked with aching eyes. The moonlight wounded her with its peace. The shimmering sea beat to a rhythm atune to a larger throb than that of a petty human life. In the starry infinitude her finitude was lost, absorbed, as a grain of sand wind-blown a few yards across an illimitable desert.

That passionate protest of the soul against the absolute unheed of nature was hers: that already defeated revolt of the whirling leaf against the soaring, far-come, far-going wind that knows nothing of what happens beneath it in the drift of its inevitable passage.

With a sob, she turned, vaguely yearning for the human peace that abode in the cottage. As she moved, she saw a shadow, solidly clear-cut in the moonlight, sweep from a rock close by, as though it were a swinging scythe.

Instinctively she glanced upward, to see if the cloud-counterpart were overhead. The sky was now cloudless: neither passing vapour nor travelling wild-swan had made that shadow leap from the smooth boulder into the darkness.

She trembled: for she feared she had seen the Watcher of the Dead. At the wane of the last moon, an old islesman had passed into the white sleep. Lora knew that his spirit would have to become the Watcher of Graves till such time as another soul should lapse into the silence. Was this he, she wondered with instinctive dread – was this Fergus, weary of his vigil, errant about the isle which had been the world to him, a drifting shadow from graveyard to byre and sheiling, from fold to dark fold, from the clachan-end to the shore-pastures, from coble to havened coble, from the place of the

boats to the ferry-rock? Did he know that he would soon have one to take over from him his dreadful peace? Or was he in no satiate peace, but anhungered as a beast of prey for the death of another? And then ... and then ... who was this other? Who next upon the isle would be the Watcher of the Dead?

With a low, shuddering breath, she sighed, "*Fergus!*"

The fall of her voice through the silence was an echo of terror. She clasped her hands across her breast. Her body swayed forward as a bulrush before the wind.

"*Ah, Dia! Dia!*" broke from her lips; for, beyond all doubt, she saw once again the moving of a darkness within the dark.

Yet what she saw was no shadow-man weary of last vigil, but something that for a moment filled her with the blindness of dread. Was it possible? Was she waylaid by one of those terrible dwellers in twilight-water of which she had heard so often from the tellers of old tales?

"*Toradh nu féudalach gun am faicinn,*" she muttered with cold lips: "the offspring of the cattle that have not been seen!"

"Ah, no, no!" she cried. The next moment, and with a sob of relief, she saw a moonbeam steal upon the hollow and reveal its quietude of dusk. She would have moved at once from boulder to boulder, eager for that lost sanctuary whence she had come – when the very pulse of her heart sprang to the burst of a human sob close by.

She stood still, as though frozen. A moment before, the breath from her lips was visible: now not the faintest vapour melted into the night-air.

Was she dreaming, she wondered, when the stifling grip at her heart had mercifully relaxed?

No: there was no mistake. Blent with the gurgle and cluck and whisper of the water among the lifted bladder-wrack and in and out of the pools and crannies in the rocks, there was the piteous sound of a human sob.

All at once, everything became clear to Lora. She knew that Alastair was near: she did not even dread that he was present as a disembodied spirit. He had reached the isle after all, but in some strange sorrow had not sought her straightway.

"*Alastair!*" she cried yearningly.

No one answered; no one stirred; nothing moved. But the muffled sobbing was hushed.

"*Alastair! Alastair!*"

Slowly from a sand-drift beside the ferry-rock a tall figure arose. For a few moments it stood motionless, black against the yellow shine of the moon. The face was pale; that of a man, young, with the thin lips, the shadowy eyes that in sunlight would shine sea-blue, the high oval features, the tangled, curly, yellow-tawny hair of the islesmen of the ancient Suderöer, in whose veins the Celtic and the Scandinavian strains commingle.

Alastair was as visible as though he were in the noon-light.

Lora looked at him, speechless. She saw that in his strained eyes, in his wrought features, which told her he had drunken of sorrow. His dishevelled hair, his whole mien and appearance showed that he was in some dire extremity.

"*Alastair!*"

He heard the low, passionate appeal, but at first he did not stir. Then, and yet as though constrainedly and in weariness, he raised and stretched forth his arms.

Swift as a gliding shadow, Lora was beside him, and clasped to his heart.

For a time, neither spoke. His heart beat loud and heavily: against his breast her head lay, with her breath coming and going like a wounded bird panting in the green-gloom of the thicket.

"O Alastair, Alastair, what is it?" she murmured at last, raising her head and looking into his pale, distraught face.

"What made you come out in the dark, *Lora-mùirnean?*"

"I could not rest. I was too unhappy. I thought – I thought – no, I do not think I dared to believe that you might come to-night after all; but something made me long to go down to the sea. Did you see me only now, dear heart?"

"No, Lora."

For a moment she was still, while she gazed fixedly at Alastair.

"Ah," she whispered at last, "then you have been here all this night, and I not knowing it! Ah, Alùinn, it was *your* heart crying to mine that made me rise and leave the cottage and come out into the dark. But why did you not come to me? When did you come to Innisròn? How did you come?"

"Dear, I could not wait for the *Clansman*. I left Greenock three hours earlier by the *Foam*, James Gilchrist's tug; for he undertook to put me ashore at the haven below Craig-Sionnach. Thence I walked to Dunmore. But I was not well, Lora; and I was so long on the way that I missed the *Clansman* as well as the Dunmore herring-steamer. Before nightfall, however, I persuaded Archibald Macleod, of Tighnacraigh, to bring me here on his smack. I landed at the Rock of the Seafold. It was already dusk, and my heart was against yours in longing, my beautiful gloom: yet over me came such a sorrow that I could not bear the homing, and so moved restlessly from shadow to shadow. I felt as though it would be better for me to deal with my sorrow alone and in the night, and that it was more bearable since I was so near you, and that any moment I could go to you."

"Why, why did you not come, Alastair? Oh, I longed, longed for you so!"

"Once I came close to the cottage, almost happy since I knew that you were so near to me. The red glow that warmed the dark without comforted me. I thought I would look in upon you for a moment; and if you and Mary were awake and talking, that I should let you know I had come. But I saw that you lay in sleep; and I had scarce time to withdraw ere, as I feared, Mary saw me – though see me, indeed, perhaps she did, for in a brief while she opened the door and came out, and would have discovered me but that I moved swiftly to the shadow of the birk-shaws. Then, after a little, I wandered down by the shore. There was a voice in the sea – calling, calling. It was so cool and sweet: soft was the balm of the air of it, as the look of your eyes, Lora, as the touch of your hand. I was almost healed of my suffering, when suddenly the pain in my head sprang upon me, and I crouched in the hollow yonder, chill with the sweat of my agony."

"O Alastair, Alastair, then you are no better: that great doctor you went so far to see has done you no good?"

"And in the midst of my pain, Lora my Rest, I saw you standing by the sea upon the ferry-ledge. At first I took you for a vision, and my heart sank. But when the moonlight reached the isle and enfolded you, I saw that it was you indeed. And once more my pain and my sorrow overcame me!"

"Alastair, I am terrified! It was not thus for you before you went away. Great as was your pain, you had not this gloom of sorrow. Oh, what is it, what is it, dear heart? Tell me, tell me!"

Slowly Alastair held Lora back from him, and looked long and searchingly into her eyes.

She shrank, in an apprehension that, like a bird, flew bewildered from the blinding light that flashed out of the darkness – a vain bewilderment of foredoom.

Then, with a great effort, she bade him tell her what he had to say.

Too well he knew there was no time to lose: that any day, any moment, his dark hour would come upon him, and that then it would be too late. Yet he would fain have waited.

"Lora, have you heard aught said by any one concerning my illness?"

"Dear, Father Mantus told me, on the day you went away, that you feared the trouble which came upon your father, and upon your father's father; and oh, Alastair my beloved, he told me what that trouble was."

"Then you know: you can understand?"

"What?"

"That which now appals me ... now kills me."

"Alastair!"

"Yes, Lora?"

"Oh, Alastair, Alastair, you do not mean that ... that ... you too ... *you* are ... are ... that *you* have the ... the ... mind-dark?"

"Dear heart of mine, this sorrow has come to us. I – "

With a sharp cry Lora held him to her, despairingly, wildly, as though even at that moment he were to be snatched from her. Then, in a passion of sobbing, she shook in his arms as a withered aspen-leaf ere it fall to the wind.

The tears ran down his face; his mouth twitched; his long, thin fingers moved restlessly in her hair and upon her quivering shoulder.

No other sound than her convulsive sobs, than his spasmodic breathing, met in the quietude of whisper-music exhaled as an odour by the sea and by the low wind among the corries and upon the grasses of the isle.

A white moth came fluttering slowly toward them, hovering vaguely awhile overhead, and then drifting alow and almost to their feet. In the shadow it loomed grey and formless – an obscure thing that might have come out of the heart of the unguarded brain. Upward again it fluttered, idly this way and that: then suddenly alit upon the hair of Alastair, poising itself on spread wings, and now all agleam as with pale phosphorescent fire, where the moonlight filled it with sheen as of white water falling against the sun.

The gleam caught Lora's eyes as, with a weary sigh, she lifted her head.

A strange smile came into her face. Slowly she disengaged her right arm, and half raised it. Alastair was about to speak, but her eyes brought silence upon him.

"*Hush!*" she whispered at last.

He saw that her eyes looked beyond his, beyond him, as it seemed. What did she see? The trouble in his brain moved anew at this touch of mystery.

"What is it, Lora?"

"Hush, hush!.. I see a sign from heaven upon your forehead ... the sign of the white peace that Seumas says is upon them who are of the company of the Belovëd."

"Lora, what are you saying? What is it? What do you see?"

His voice suddenly was harsh, fretful. Lora shrank for a moment; then, as the white moth rose and fluttered away into the dark, faintly agleam with moonfire till it reached the shadow, she pitifully raised her hand to his brow.

"Come, dear, let us go in. All will be well with us, whatever happens."

"Never ... never ... never!"

"O Alastair, if it be God's will?"

"Ay, and if it be God's will?"

"I cannot lose you; you will always be mine; no sorrow can part us; nothing can separate us; nothing but the Passing, and that ..."

"Lora!"

For answer she looked into his eyes.

"Lora, it is of that, of the Passing: ... are you ... are you brave enough not only to endure ... but to ... if we thought it well ... if I asked you...?"

A deep silence fell upon both. Hardly did either breathe. By some strange vagary of the strained mind, Lora thought the throb of her heart against her side was like the pulse of the engines of the *Clansman* to which she had listened with such intent expectation that very evening.

From the darkness to the north came the low monotone of the sea, as a muffled voice prophesying through the gates of Sleep and Death. Far to the east the tide-race tore through the Sound with a confused muttering of haste and tumult. Upon the isle the wind moved as a thing in pain, or idly weary: lifting now from cranny to corrie, and through glen and hollow, and among the birk-shaws and the rowans, with long sighs and whispers where by Uisghe-dhu the valley of moonflowers sloped

to the sea on the west, or among the reeds, and the gale, and the salt grasses around the clachan that lay duskily still on the little brae above the haven.

"Lora ... would you ... would...?"

Only her caught breath at intervals gave answer. The short lisp and gurgle of the water in the seaweed close by came nearer. The tide was on the flood, and the sand about their feet was already damp.

The immense semicircle of the sky domed sea and land with infinity. In the vast space the stars and planets fulfilled their ordered plan. Star by star, planet by planet, sun by sun, universe by universe moved jocund in the march of eternal death.

Beyond the two lonely figures, seaward, the moon swung, green-gold at the heart with circumambient flame of pearl.

Beautiful the suspended lamp of her glory – a censer swung before the Earth-Altar of the Unknown.

In their human pain the two drew closer still. The remote alien silences of the larger life around vaguely appalled them. Yet Lora knew what was in his thought; what he foreshadowed; what he wished.

"It shall be as you will, Alastair, heart of me, life of me," she whispered. Then, with clasping arms, and dear entreaty, she urged him homeward.

"Come, come home, Alastair, *Alùinn*. Enough of sorrow to-night. Speak to me to-morrow of all that is in your mind; but to-night ... to-night, no more! My heart will break. Come, dearest. Come, *mo mùirnean*! Hark! the wind is crying in the corrie: it is rising again on the other side of the isle: and we are already chill – oh, cold, so cold!"

Hand in hand, they moved slowly upward along the little pathway of mingled grass and shingle which led to the clachan from the ferry: he with bowed head, she with upward face.

A dog barked from a byre, another answered from a sheiling beyond. Suddenly there was a rushing sound, and Ghaoth, Alastair's dog, came leaping upon his master, whining and barking with joy. He stooped and fondled it; but in vain tried to quell its ecstasy in seeing him again.

Whether aroused by the barking of Ghaoth, or having awoke and found Lora absent from the cottage, Mrs. Maclean had risen, lit a candle, and now stood upon the threshold, looking intently at the twain as they approached.

Among the islefolk many words are not used. The over-arching majesty of the sky, the surrounding majesty of the sea, the loneliness of these little wind-swept spots of earth isled in remote waters, leave a hush upon the brain, and foster eloquent silences rather than idle words.

Mrs. Maclean knew intuitively that something of disaster was in this nocturnal return of Alastair: that he and Lora had met by chance, or through a summons unknown to her: and that now they came – to her, in their youth, so tragically piteous under the shadow of calamity – craving only for that impossible boon of the young in sorrow: peace.

When they drew near to her, she turned and placed the candle on the table. Then, facing them, she came forward, led them in by the hand, and closed the door. She saw that Alastair was hatless, and his clothes damp and travel-stained; so with quiet, home-sweet words, she persuaded him to change his things while she laid some food for him to break his long fast with.

But though wearily he did the one, he would have nothing of the other save a draught of warm milk.

A heavy drowsiness was now upon him. He could scarce uplift the lids from his eyes. His voice, when he spoke at all, was so low that it was barely audible.

After a silence, during which he had looked long at the fire, and closed his eyes at the last, with Lora's gaze hungrily set upon him, and the dark, sweet gloom of Mrs. Maclean's, wet with the dew of unshed tears, upon both of the twain, whom she loved so passing well, he murmured huskily and confusedly:

"By green pastures ... I will lay me down to sleep... It calleth, calleth ..."

Suddenly Mrs. Maclean arose. Taking Lora's hand, she led her to the fireside and motioned her to kneel beside Alastair. Then, blowing out the candle-flame, she too knelt. Only the fireglow now lit the room, filled with brooding shadows in the corners and with warm dusk where the two women kneeled and the man slept.

With arms lifted as if in invocation, the elder woman – her face wan under her grey hair, though touched with an unreal glow from the flaming peats – in a low, crooning voice, repeated the ancient rest-words, the ancient prayer of her people, said at the covering up of the fire against the hours of sleep:

*"Smàlaidh mis'n nochd an teine;  
Mar a smàlas Mac Moire.  
Gu'm bu slan an tigh's an teine,  
Gu'm bu slan a' chiudeachd uile.  
Co bhios air an lar?  
Peadair agus Pòl,  
Co bhios air an phaire nochd?  
Moire mhin-gheal's a Mac.  
Bial De a labhras,  
Aingeal geal a dh' innseas —  
Ga'r comhnadh's ga'r gleidheadh  
Gus an tig an solus geal a maireach."*

I will cover up the fire aright,  
Even as directed by the Virgin's Son.  
Safe be the house, and safe the fire,  
And safe from harm be all the indwellers.  
Who is that that I see on the floor?  
Even Peter himself and Paul.  
Upon whom shall this night's vigil rest?  
Upon the blameless Virgin and her Son:  
God's mouth has spoken it.  
A white-robed angel shall be with us in the dark,  
Till the coming of the sun at morn.

When she ceased, there was no sound save the low sobbing of Lora and the quiet breathing of the sleeper in the high-backed chair.

Having made the sign of the cross upon her breast and over the fire, she covered up the flame with ash and charred peat. Quietly, then, she placed her strong arm around Alastair, and half guided, half lifted him to the bed in the adjoining room where he and Lora were wont to sleep. The girl-wife followed, and, with deft hands, unclad Alastair and laid him gently in the bed. Swiftly disrobing herself, she lay down by his side, her dark hair mingling on the pillow with his tangle of dull gold.

The gleam still emitted between the bars from beneath the covered peats passed into the room through the open doorway and fell upon the bed.

Alastair stirred; opened his eyes; looked with wild, startled gaze at Lora, then at Mrs. Maclean, who had again knelt, and with raised arms had begun her "Blessing of Peace."

With a sigh he closed his eyes, and the terror passed from his face. Once or twice he muttered parts of the lines of that ancient sleep-prayer, familiar to him since his boyhood, and before it was ended deep slumber had come upon him:

*"Laidhidh misc 'nochd  
Le Moire 's le 'Mac,  
Le mathair mo Rìgh,  
'Ni mo dhion 'o dhroch-bheairt,  
Cha laidh mise leis an olc,  
'S cha laidh an t' olc leam;  
Ach laidhidh mì le Dia,  
'S laidhidh Dia Ma' rium.  
Lamh dheas Dhe fo'm cheann,  
Crois nan naoi aingeal leam.  
'O mhullach mo chinn  
Gu craican mo bhonn,  
Guidheam Peadair, guidheam Pòl,  
Guidheam Moir-Oigh' 'sa Mac.  
Guidheam an da ostal deug,  
Gun mise 'dhol eug le'n cead.  
'Dhia 'sa Mhoire na gloire.  
'S a Mhic na oighe cubhraidh  
Cumabh mise o na piantan dorcha,  
'S Micheal geal' an cò 'ail m'anama."*

This night I will lay me down to sleep  
With Mary Virgin and her Son,  
Even with the mother of my King,  
Who protects me from all evil;  
Nor shall evil lie down to sleep with me,  
But I shall sleep with God:  
And with me shall God lie down.  
His right arm shall be under my head:  
The cross of the Nine Angels be about me,  
From the top of my head  
To the soles of my feet.  
I supplicate Peter, I supplicate Paul,  
I supplicate Mary the Virgin and her Son,  
I supplicate the twelve Apostles,  
That evil befall us not this night.  
Mary, in thy goodness and glory,  
And Thou, Son of the sweet-savoured Virgin,  
Protect us this night from all the pains of darkness.  
And thou, Michael, guardian of souls, abide with us, watching.

When she looked down, at the end of her prayer, Mary saw that Lora's eyes also were closed; though by the muttering of the lips she knew her dear one was not asleep.

Softly she closed the door behind her; then, passing by the fire, went into the third room of the cottage.

Soon she too was in bed, softly repeating, as the weariness of sleep came over her:

*Cha laidh mise leis an olc,  
'S cha laidh an t' olc leam.*

Without, came the rising sound of the tide among the pebbles on the shore, the incessant chime of wave lapsing over wave on flat rocks. The sough of the wind fell from the corries of Craig-an-Iolair, and died in whispers among the fern and dew-cold grasses.

So went the hours from silence into silence. And in time came the dawn, and an ashen-grey upon the sea, and a grey gloom upon each leaf and every dusky frond and blade. But when the black of the mainland became gold, and a trouble of light moved, swiftly-throbbing, across the eastern water, Michael the Watcher withdrew.

At the window of the room where Alastair and Lora slept, the beautiful sunflood of the new day poured in rejoicingly.

One long streamer of light fell upon his yellow hair and kissed the eyelids of a veiled, subsiding mind. Downward it moved, and filled with its gleam the dark-brown hair which lay across the white breast of Lora. Then, surely, it passed beneath the flower of her bosom and into her heart, and warmed it with joy; for with a smile she awoke, murmuring,

*"Pharais, Pharais."*

### III

Before the want of that day, the rumour went among the scant population of Innisròn that Alastair, son of Diarmid of Macleod, was mad: that, in the phrasing of the islesman, he had the mind-dark.

Men and women whispered the thing with awe. In the West, something almost of a hieratic significance is involved in the poetic phrase that God has filled with dusk the house of the brain. Not thus is spoken of the violence of insanity – the mere insurgence of delirium from the fever of hate, or from jealousy, or love, or evil of the blood, or the curse of drink. But that veil of darkness which comes down upon the mind of man or woman in the fullness of life, and puts an impermeable mist or a twilight of awful gloom about the soul, is looked upon not only with an exceeding tenderness, but with awe, and as of a bowing of the head before a divine mystery.

Yet the rumour was not true, for Alastair Macleod, though he stood within the shadow, had not yet sunk into the darkness.

As it had chanced, Mrs. Maclean was not the only person who had seen him and Lora on their return.

Late in the night Ian Maclean had come back from the western side of the isle, and was standing in the shadow of the byre when, hand in hand, Lora and Alastair approached.

The old man had been unhappy, and, after leaving his kinsman at Ardfeulan, had wandered up among the corries. In the wail of the wind along the heights, in the sough of it in the little glens and shelving uplands, he heard voices to which he would fain not have listened, for they spoke of a terror that was in the air.

The moment he saw Alastair's eyes, dark within the moonlit pallor of the face, he knew that his premonitions were no mere imaginings. On his forehead he saw the shadow of doom.

With a sigh he turned, and, having entered the byre and gone to the part of it shut off for his use, lay down upon his bed of fragrant fern. But, weary as he was, he could not sleep.

Again the vision came to him: and once more he saw Alastair move blindly in an unfamiliar place, with the mist no longer up to his waist only, but risen now to his throat, and with thin tongues reaching upward still.

The long night went drearily past. When the day was come, Ian rose and let out the kye. The sweet freshness of the air was as balm to his weariness. The wind blew cool upon his brows, and a breath of the sea mingled with the myriad suspiration of the earth and gave him the intoxication of the dawn. His eyes grew brighter, his step firmer, his mien no longer that of profound dejection; and when Ghaoth came leaping toward him, and barked about the half-amused, half-angry cows – who stopped to plash their hoofs in the thick white dew, against which the warm breaths fell revolvingly like grey whorls of steam, and to swing their great horns against their flanks, wild and shaggy as the brown hill-sides in autumn – then all the gloom of the night went from him.

"Mayhap it was but a dream," he muttered: "and who can tell the folly of the mind?"

Then, with Ghaoth's help, he got the steers from the neighbouring shed and "Righ-geal," the great tawny-shaggy bull, whose either horn could have pierced right through and beyond the biggest drover who ever crossed the Kyles at Colintraive, and urged all the kine upward to the higher pastures, where the thyme was so sweet, close-clustered as it was among the soft green hair of the isle-grass.

It seemed to him as though all the larks on Innisròn were singing at one time and just there, everywhere around and above him. In the birk-shaws, there was a mavis that was as a fount wherefrom music spilled intoxicatingly: by the burn, the merles called, recalled, and called yet again, and over and over, sweet and blithe, and with loud, reckless cries of mirth and joy. On every gorse-bush, yellow with bloom, fragrant almost to pain, and filled with the murmur of the wild-bee and the high, thin

hum of the wood-wasp, a yellow-hammer flitted to and fro, or sang its *tweet – tweet – tweet – o-o-oh sweet! – sweet!*

The sky was almost cloudless save for an angry flush in the north-east – a deep, living blue of infinite, though indiscernibly faint gradation. Here and there, too, were thin, almost invisible grey mare's-tails swept upward, as though they were snow-dust or sea-spray, before the flying feet of the Weaver of the Winds.

As soon as Ian had reached the last dyke, and had seen "Righ-geal" lead his impatient following toward the uplands, he stood swaying his grey head slowly to and fro, with his right hand moving automatically in rhythmic accord, while he repeated the familiar "Rann Buacbailleac," or Rune on the driving of the cattle to the pasture:

## I

"Siubhal beinne, siubhal baile,  
Siubhal gu re fada farsuinn;  
Buachaille Mhic De m'ar casaibh,  
Gu mu slan a thig sibh dachaidh,  
Buachaille Mhic De m'ar casaibh  
Gu mu slan a thig sibh dachaidh."

## II

"Comraig, Dhia agus Chalum-Chille,  
Bhith m'ar timchioll a fabh's a tilleadh,  
Agus nan or-chiabh down!  
Agus Banachaig nan basa min-gheal,  
Bride nan or-chiabh down!"

## I

Travel ye moorland, travel ye townland,  
Travel ye gently far and wide,  
God's Son be the Herdsman about your feet,  
Whole may ye home return.  
God's Son be the Herdsman about your feet,  
Whole may ye home return.

## II

The protection of God and of Columba,  
Encompass your going and coming;

And about you be the milkmaid of the smooth white palms,  
Bridget of the clustering hair, golden brown,  
And about you be the milkmaid of the smooth white palms,  
Bridget of the clustering hair, golden brown!

Turning aside, the shepherd searched here and there among the boulders and split rocks which everywhere obtruded from the sea of heather. For a time his quest was unrewarded; but just as he was about to relinquish it he gave an abrupt exclamation. He had seen the *Torranan*, that rare plant, of which he had often heard, but had never found: and, for sure, he would never have sought it there, for it was said to be a plant of the sea's lip – that is to say, of the shore, within reach of the tide-breath.

Muttering over and over, "*Buainams' thu thorrain!*" – Let me pluck thee, Torranan, – he gained the precious bloom at last, and then, holding it before him, half spoke, half chanted this ancient incantation, known in the isles as the "Eolas an Torrain," a spell of good service to keep the cows from the harm of the evil eye, and also to increase their milk:

*"Buainams' thu thoranain  
Le'd uile bheannachd's le'd uile bhuidh —"*

Let me pluck thee, Torranan!  
With all thy blessedness and all thy virtue.  
The nine blessings came with the nine parts,  
By the virtue of the Torranan.  
The hand of St. Bride with me.  
I am now to pluck thee.

Let me pluck thee, Torranan!  
With thine increase as to sea and land;  
With the flowing tide that shall know no ebbing  
By the assistance of the chaste St. Bride,  
The holy St. Columba directing me,  
Gentle Oran protecting me,  
And St. Michael, of high-crested steeds,  
Imparting virtue to the matter the while,  
Darling plant of all virtue,  
I am now plucking thee!

All the time the old man had been carefully disengaging the cream-white, dome-shaped flower, he had crooned over and over:

*"Lamh Bhride leam,  
Tha mi 'nis ga'd bhuidh!"*

The hand of St. Bride with me  
I am now to pluck thee!

So, too, now – now that he had the Torranan safe at last, he kept repeating:

*"Cuir buaidh anns an ni,  
Tha mo lus lurach a nis air a bhuidh!"*

Darling plant of all virtue,  
I am now plucking thee!

But the line that was on his lips for long that day – even after he had given the flower to Mary Maclean, with assurance that it was gathered during the lift of the tide, was *Ri lionadh gun tra'adh*– "With the flowing tide that shall know no ebbing." Over and over he said this below his breath. *Ri lionadh gun tra'adh*; strange words these: what was the hidden thing in them? What was the *lionadh*, the flowing tide: was it life or death?

But now the rare bloom was found: he was glad of that. He doffed his weather-worn bonnet, and placed the flower in the hollow of it: then, calling Ghaoth from the already scattered kye, he turned and made his way back to the clachan.

When he entered Mrs. Maclean's cottage, where his breakfast of porridge was ready, he made and received the usual salutation of blessing: and then sat down in silence.

The room was full of sunlight – so full that Mrs. Maclean had hung a screen of bracken from an iron hook, so that it shielded the peat-fire and let the life of the flame burn unchecked.

He did not look at Alastair; and, indeed, all the morning-blitheness had gone out of the eyes of the old man. Not that any there noticed his taciturnity. Mrs. Maclean moved softly to and fro. Alastair sat broodingly in the leathern chair before the fire: Lora on a stool at his feet, with her right hand clasped in his left and her eyes fixed on his face. On the table the porridge was untouched, the new bread uncut, the warm milk grown tepid.

With a sigh, Alastair rose at last. Crossing the room, he went to the east window and stared forth unseeingly, or, at any rate, without sign of any kind. Then, restlessly, he began to pace to and fro. Repressing her tears, Lora seated herself at the table and tried to eat, hopeful that she might thus induce him to do likewise. Mrs. Maclean followed her example, but ate in silence. She had almost ended, when Lora saw that she had abruptly laid down her spoon and was looking intently at Ian.

The old man now followed every motion of the invalid with a look as of one fascinated. When, suddenly, Alastair turned, went to the door and crossed the threshold, Ian rose and followed.

A few seconds later he came back, his withered face almost as white as his hair.

Mrs. Maclean met him ere he could speak.

"Not a word before *her*" she whispered.

"Meet me at the byre: I shall be there in a minute or two."

But just then Lora rose and went out.

"Ian Maclean, what is it?"

"Mary, my kinswoman, he is not alone."

"Not alone?"

"I have seen *the other*"

She knew now what he meant. He had seen the shadow-self, the phantasm of the living that, ere death, is often seen alongside the one who shall soon die. Mrs. Maclean knew well that this shadowy second-self simulated the real self, and that even all the actions of the body were reproduced with a grotesque verisimilitude. But she was also aware how, sometimes, one may learn from the mien of the phantasm what is hidden in the aspect of the doomed.

"Last night," Ian went on in a dull voice, "I had the sight again. I saw the mist of death as high about him as when a man is sunken in a peat-bog up to the eyes."

"Well? I know you have more to say."

"Ay."

"Speak, Ian!"

With a long, indrawn breath, the old man resumed in a slow, reluctant voice.

"When I came in, a little ago, I saw the sorrow there was on every face. My vision, too, came back upon me, and I had trouble. I meant to eat and go out quickly. But when Mr. Alastair began to move about, I saw that he was not alone. I knew *the other* at once. There could be no mistake. In dress, in height, in face, in movement, they were the same. But there was a difference."

Mrs. Maclean shuddered slightly, and her lips opened as though she were about to speak. With a gesture, however, she signed to Ian to continue.

"Ay, there was a difference. I hoped against my eyes; but when I followed him yonder I saw what I saw, and what killed my hope."

"Speak, speak, Ian!"

"In all things, the same but one, and that was in the eyes, in the expression. Those of Mr. Alastair were dull and lightless, and brooding low; those of *the other* were large and wild, and stared in terror and amaze; and on the face of the thing the Fear lay, and moved, and was alive."

"O Ian, Ian, what does it mean?"

"It means this, Mary, daughter of Donnacha, what, sure, you know well: that not only is the shadow of death near this house, but that upon Alastair Mac Diarmid is the mind-dark that lay upon his father and upon his father's father."

"The curse of Michael be upon this evil, Ian!"

"Even so, *Mhoire nighean Donnacha*."

"His father was the third of his race in succession, who, soon or late, fell under that shadow. And we all know, sure we all know, that after the third generation the veil is withdrawn. This thing is an evil dream of yours, Ian Maclean!"

"It is an evil doing of *some one*," muttered the old man, with sombre eyes.

"Perhaps" —

But before Mrs. Maclean could say what was in her mind, Alastair and Lora entered.

With downcast eyes Ian passed out, giving a furtive, terrified look behind him ere he closed the door.

It was through the old islesman that the rumour of Alastair Macleod's madness went abroad.

Long before the stormy afternoon which followed the beautiful youth of that day, with its ominous morning-red in the north-east, had waned to gloaming, there was not a soul on Innisròn who did not know of the sorrow.

Yet no one came near out of a cruel sympathy: no one spoke heedless words either of question or solace to Mrs. Maclean; for none could be said to the two most concerned, neither Alastair nor Lora having been seen throughout the day.

Nevertheless, a deep resentment prevailed against one person upon the island. Not only had the spring gone ill with the fishing, but the nets had been torn and trailed in a way that suggested something beyond the blind malice of wind and wave and the currents of the deep sea and the savage dog-fish. Several cows had ceased to give milk; hens had ceased to lay; and Gregor McGregor's white mare had dropped a dead foal, the first time such a thing had happened on the isle. And now that, unforeseen and in the heyday of youth and health, the worst of all troubles had come upon Alastair Macleod, many recalled how his father, Macleod of Dunvrechan, who had died on Innisròn, had not only once denounced old Ealasaid MacAodh as a woman of the evil eye, but had cursed her ere he died, and attributed his misery to a blight of her working.

As one spake to another, the same thought came into each mind: that the old widow who lived at Craig-Ruaidh, at the head of the Glen of the Dark Water, had put her malice upon Alastair Mac Diarmid.

Some one, in a group by the ferry, reminded her hearers that, by a mischance, every one on the isle save Widow MacAodh had been invited to the feast in the little mission-house, when "*Lora nighean maighstir Tormaid*" was wedded; and how it was well known that old Ealasaid had been full

of anger and pain at the slight, and had since scarce spoken with any one save Mrs. Maclean, with whom no bitterness was ever long to endure.

"Ay, ay, it's her doing – it's her doing," was muttered all round; "she has put the spell of the evil eye upon him – foreigner that she is."

Many years had gone by since Duncan bàn MacAodh, a Hebridean, who had settled in Innisròn, brought thither a wife out of remote St. Kilda. Long since he had gone to his rest, and lay among the few dead under the great runic cross at the extreme of Ardfeulan, on the west of the isle; yet he was still "the man from Uist," as his widow was still the "outlander."

"Ian," said Pòl Macdonald, one of the oldest of the fishermen, "you too are said to have *the thing* in you, though you always look through both eyes, and with good will to man and beast. Let you, and two others of us, go to-night to Widow Ealasaid's, do upon her and find out if she is accursed: ...and then...and then..."

No one spoke, though a veiled consenting glance went between Macdonald and Ian and a young islesman, Ronald Macrae, who lived over by Ardfeulan.

It was not a subject to discuss further in that hour of uncertainty. One or two members of the group had already edged away, when Kathia Macdonald suddenly drew attention to the appearance of the first three of the returning herring-boats, anxiously expected for over an hour past.

The brown-sailed wherries came in under the lee of the isle in a smother of foam. Already a snarling north-easter was racing over the sea, still smelling of the ling and bracken it had flattened as it tore over the summits of the mainland hills.

The water was of a shifting emerald near the haven; of a dark bottle-green beyond; and, out in the open, black, fretted and torn with staring white splashes and a myriad-leaping surge.

The race of the sea-horses had begun, and no one on Innisròn was at ease till the last boat had come safely round from Ardgheal, the point whence on the yestereve Lora had so eagerly watched for the coming of her husband.

A fiery sunset disclosed the immense and swirling procession of clouds high over the isle – cloud not only racing after cloud, but often leaping one upon the other as flying sheep in panic. Toward the east, the vapours were larger and darker: the cohorts more densely massed. Above the mainland stretched one vast unbroken phalanx of purple-livid gloom, out of the incessant and spasmodically convulsive travail in whose depths swept monstrous cloudbirths.

As the night fell, there was audible beyond the hills the noise of a baffled thunderstorm – a tempest which had been caught among the mountains, and could no more lift itself over the summits than a screaming and wrestling eagle could tear itself from a stag in whose hide its talons had become irremovably gripped.

Above the peaks and along the flank of the mass of livid gloom, spears of lightning were swung against the wind; and with splinter and flash, there was a rain of whirled lances as against some unseen assault from below.

The tumult soared, hurled downward, and fell upon Innisròn. The isle-folk listened in the dark with awe. Roar and crash, and a frightful, terrifying howling followed every blast, as of a volcano belching forth avalanche after avalanche, and shaking to the valleys the *débris* of all the hills. Roar upon roar, crash upon crash, howl upon howl: with the strident raucous scream of the wind, yelling a pæan of triumph as it leaped before the javelins of the lightning and tore in its ruinous might far out across the heaving, swaying, moaning sea.

It was a night for all who fare by or upon the deep waters to remember with awe: for those whose lives, and kin, and gear had gone scatheless, to recollect with thanksgiving: for those whose weal went with it, to recall with bowed heads or wet eyes.

An hour or more after nightfall, three figures moved with the wind across the isle: blurred shadows astir in the tempest-riven dark. Ronald Macrae carried a lantern; but speedily laid it down by a cairn, for the flame could not live.

He and Ian and Pòl were grimly silent, not only on the path through the wind-swept heather, but when under shelter from a bight of hillside or overhanging crag. The business that took them out in that tempest lay heavy upon them.

If, out of her own mouth, or by sign or deed of her own, Ealasaid should convict herself of the use of the evil eye, her doom would be fixed. Even in the bitterness of superstition, however, the islesmen were not bent upon the extreme penalty, the meed of those who deal in witchcraft. The dwellers on Innisròn, as all who live among the outer isles in general, are too near the loneliness of life and death to be wanton in the taking away of that which is so great in the eyes of man and so small in the eyes of God.

The worst they intended was to make Ealasaid bring her own doom upon her: then, on the morrow, her sheiling would be burned to the ground and the ashes scattered to the four quarters, while she herself would be exiled from the island under ban of cross, mystic word, and the ancient Celtic anathema.

So wild was the wind and dark the way, that a full hour passed before they reached the Glen of the Dark Water, and heard the savage ramping and charging of the endless squadrons of the waves against the promontory of Ardfeulan.

As they drew near the little cottage, a lonely dwelling on the brae which sloped to the glen, they saw that the occupant had not yet gone to bed, for a red gleam of light stole comfortingly across the forlorn dark.

With a significant touch on the shoulder of each of his companions, Ian led them to within a yard or two of the window.

"Hush," he whispered, in a momentary lull; "make no noise as we look in. She might hear, and blast us with her evil eye. Perhaps she is even now talking with some warlock or fiend."

Trembling, the three men huddled under the wall. At last, slowly, and with hearts wildly a-throb, they raised themselves and looked within.

The room was bare in its clean poverty. On the rickety wooden table was a bowl with a little unfinished porridge in it. A yard away was an open Gaelic Bible, with a pair of horn spectacles laid across the open page. At a spinning stool between the table and the peat-fire was an old woman, kneeling, with her hands clasped and her face upraised. On the poor, tired, worn features was a look of pathetic yearning, straining from a white and beautiful peace.

So rapt was she that she did not see a hand move the outer latch of the window, or feel the sudden breath of the night-air.

Then those without, waiting to hearken to sorcery more appalling than the savagery of the tempest, heard old Ealasaid repeat this prayer:

*"Tha 'n la nis air falbh àinn,  
Tha 'n oidhche 'tighinn orm dlùth;  
'S ni mise luidhe gu dìon  
Fo dhubhar sgiath mo rùin.  
O gach cunnart 's o gach bàs,  
'S o gach nàmhaid th' aig Mac Dhe,  
O nàdur dhaoine borba,  
'S o choirbteachd mo nàduir fèin,  
Gabhaidh mis' a nis armachd Dhe,  
Gun bhi reubta no brisd',  
'Sge b' oil leis an t' sàtan 's le phàirt  
Bi'dh mis' air mo gheàrd a nis."*

The day is now gone;

Dark night gathers around,  
And I will lay me safely down (to sleep)  
Under the shadow of my Beloved One's wing.  
Against all dangers, and death in every form,  
Against each enemy of God's good Son,  
Against the anger of the turbulent people,  
And against the corruption of my own nature,  
I will take unto me the armour of God —  
That shall protect me from all assaults:  
And in spite of Satan and all his following,  
I shall be well and surely guarded.

When, after an interval of speechless prayer, the lonely old woman rose painfully to her feet, she noticed the open window, and heard the sigh of the wind without.

With a tired sigh, she crossed the room to close the inside latch. But, at the window, she stood irresolute, held by the noise of the sea beating against the clamour of the wind. She stooped, and peered forth.

Not a thing was visible. Suddenly a broad wavering gleam of sheet-lightning lit up the whole brae. Almost, she fancied, she could have sworn she saw three human figures, with bowed heads, moving across the brow of the slope.

She could not know that three men, stricken with shame and remorse – remorse which would ere long bloom into the white flower of repentance, to be worn lovingly by all on the isle – were stealing homeward from a vain and wicked errand.

With a shudder, she crossed herself, fearing that the figures she had imagined, or had really seen, were the three dreadful Accursed who drove the spear into Christ's side and the nails into His hands and feet, and with mocking offered Him the bitter sponge.

Slowly repeating:

"O gach cunnart 's o gach bàs,  
'S o gach nàmhaid th' aig Mac Dhe,"

she quenched with charred peat the flame of her fire, and was soon in a child-like rest "under the shadow of the wing of her Beloved One."

When midnight came upon the isle, the worst violence of the storm was over. Nevertheless, upon the sea was the awfulness of desolation, the rumour of a terrible wrath.

All slept at last: the innocent Ealasaid, the foolish seekers of evil, the isle-folk one and all – except two.

Alastair and Lora lay in each others' arms as children terrified in the dark.

That afternoon his madness had come upon him for a while; and he had smiled grimly at he knew not what, and laughed while the tears streamed from the eyes of Lora and Mary; and moaned betimes; and cried out against the calling of the sea; and closed his ears against the frightful wailing of a kelpie in the tarn beyond the byre; and, at the last, shook as in an ague before the fire, fearful of some incommensurate terror, but with such a crown of sorrow on his forehead that the two women bowed their faces in their hands, speechless with grief: with such a horror in his eyes that Ghaath shrank from him with bristling fell and upcurled, snarling lip.

But with the night came yet another merciful lifting of the veil.

While the storm raged at its worst, the three kneeled, and Mrs. Maclean read from the beautiful Gaelic Scripture. Then, with all the tenderness of her childless passion of maternity, she prayed for God's balm and peace and the healing of His hand.

When, in time, she went to her own room, Alastair and Lora talked for long in a low voice.

On the day he had first heard that the seed of life had taken root in her womb, and knew that a child was to be born of their great love, he had known a thrill of such rapture that he could scarce see Lora for the blinding of the tears of joy.

Beautiful she was to all: to him, lovely and tender as twilight and dear beyond words: but at that moment, when he learned from her own lips of her only half explicable trouble, he knew he had passed into a Holy of Holies of love and reverent passion such as he had but vaguely dreamed of as possible.

But now, on this wild night of storm without and more awful dread within, he recalled with horror what had been driven from his mind.

Bitter as was the doom he and Lora had to face, tenfold bitter was it made by the thought that they were to bring into the world yet another soul shrouded in the shadow of his own intolerable ill.

And so it was that, at the last, Alastair and Lora Macleod, knowing his madness was at hand and could be cured of no man, and that their lives were spilled out as lees from a cup, and that they were witlessly dooming the unborn child to a heritage of grief, gave solemn troth to each other that on the morrow they would go forth hand in hand, and, together in death as in life, lay themselves beneath that ever-wandering yet ever-returning wave which beats day and night, and week by week, and year by year, and without end for ever, about the sea-gathered graveyard on the remote west of Innisròn.

Then was a great peace theirs. For the last time they laid themselves down on their bed: for the last time twined their arms around each other, while on the same pillow their heads lay side by side, the hair about his forehead wet with her falling tears: for the last time they kept vigil through the terror of the dark – an awful terror now, with the wrath of the sea without, with the shadow of Death within the room, with the blackness of oblivion creeping, creeping from chamber to chamber in the darkened house of a dulled, subsiding brain.

Ere dawn, Alastair slept. Lora lay awake, trembling, longing for the day, yet praying God to withhold it; sick with baffled hope, with the ache of weariness, with the sound of the moan and hollow boom of the sea. More deep and terrible in her ears grew that midnight Voice, reverberant in the room as in the whorl of a shell: a dreadful iterance of menace, a dirge that confusedly she seemed to know well, a swelling chant, a requiem.

## IV

An hour after sunrise there was not a cloud in the sky. The first day of June came clad in the fullness of summer. Sea and land seemed as though they had been immersed in that Fount of Life which wells from the hollow of the Hand which upholdeth Tir-na-h' Oighe, the isle of eternal youth.

The low island-trees had not suffered as had those on the mainland: yet everywhere were strewn branches, and, on the uplands, boughs wrenched away, and often hurled far from the parent tree.

But upon all the isle there was now a deep quiescence. In the warm languor, even the birds sang less wildly clear, though the high, remote, falling lark-music floated spirally earthward, poignantly sweet. An indescribably delicate shimmer of haze lay on the heights and pastures, and where the corries sloped jaggedly seaward, each with a singing burn splashing or wimpling adown its heart. From the uplands came the lowing of the kine, the bleating of the ewes and lambs, the rapid whirring gurgle of the grouse among the heather. The wailing of curlews rose and fell; the sharp cries of the cliff-hawks beat against Craig-Ruaidh. High overhead, as motionlessly in motion as the snow-white disc of the moon lying immeasurably more remote within the vast blue hollow of the sky, an eagle poised on outspread wings, and then, without visible effort or movement, drifted slowly out of sight like a cloud blown by the wind.

Only upon the sea was something of the tumult of the past night still a reality.

Around the isle, and in the wide Sound between it and the mainland, the "white sheep" moved in endless procession, no longer wildly dispersed and huddled and torn by the wolves of the tempest. Oceanward the sea-horses swept onward magnificently, champing and whirling white foam about their green flanks, and tossing on high their manes of sunlit rainbow gold, dazzling-white and multitudinous far as sight could reach.

Clamour of gulls, noise of waves, lisp and chime and flute-call of the shallows among the rock-holes and upon the whispering tongues of the sea-weed – what joy, and stir, and breath of life!

Hand in hand, in the hot noon, Lora and Alastair went idly along the sheep-path leading from the clachan to the promontory of Ardgheal. The smell of the brine from the sea and wrack-strewn shore, the sun-wrought fragrance of the grass and thyme, of bracken and gale, of birch and hawthorn and trailing briar, of the whole, beautiful, living, warm body of the earth so lay upon the tired senses with a healing as of balm, that even the tears in Lora's eyes ceased to gather, leaving there only a softness as of twilight-dew in violets.

It was to be their last walk in the sunshine of that day – their last participance in the sunshine of life.

All the morning had been spent by Alastair in writing and brooding. Once again he had talked over with Lora that projected deed, which to them seemed the one right and fitting end to the tragedy of circumstance. She had promised that even if the darkness came down upon his mind irretrievably she would fulfill her troth with him. Great love casteth out fear; but even if this had not been so with her, she bore in mind the menace of what he had said about the child.

She, too, had spent a little of that last morning in writing, though her letter was not to go across the sea to the mainland, but to be left with old Ian to give to Mary on the morrow.

It was close upon noon when she saw that Alastair's gloom was upon him again, though he was now as quiet as a child. Taking his hand, she led him forth, heedful to avoid the clachan, and vaguely wishful to visit once more that little eastern haven of Ardgheal where, but two days ago, she had longingly awaited Alastair's return, and where, months before, he had first won her love.

He seemed to take pleasure in the sight of the sea he loved so well, and in the songs of the birds, and to be vaguely displeased because Ghaoth would not leap to his caress as usual, or else would crouch at his feet with startled eyes and low whine.

When Lora spoke, he answered seldom; but when he did, she knew that he understood. Once or twice he looked at her strangely; and once, with a thrill of awe and dread, she saw that it was unrecognisingly.

She caught the fragment of an *Eolas*, a spell, as his lips moved; and the fear was upon her because of the mystery behind the words:

"*S i'n t-suil a chi,  
'S e'en cridhe a smuainicheas,  
'S i'n teanga 'labhras:  
'S mise'n Triuir qu tilleadh so ortsa, Lora-mo-bèan,  
An ainm an Athar, a Mhic, 's an Spioraidh Naoimh!*"

'T is the eye that sees,  
'T is the heart that thinks,  
'T is the tongue that speaks:  
I am the Three to turn this off to you, Lora, my wife:  
In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

With a sob, she turned and put her arms about him. Never had he seemed so fair in her sight – tall and comely as a young pine, of a beauty beyond that of any man she had ever seen. No wonder that her father, familiar lover of the Ossianic ballads, had been wont, remembering the beauty of the second son of Usnoth, lord of Etha, to call Alastair *Ailthos*.

"Dear, my dear one, Ailthos, Alastair!" she cried, clinging close. "Look at me! Speak to me! Do you not know me?"

Slowly he turned his eyes upon her, and after a brief perplexity the shadow went out of them, and he smiled gently.

"Let us go home, my fawn," he whispered. "I am tired. It would be too sad to go down to Ardheal."

He had already caught sight of the smoke of a steamer beyond Dunmore Point; and fearing that it might be the *Clansman*— for he thought the hour much later than it was – he hoped to spare Lora another needless pang. Moreover, his growing dread of seeing any one was stronger than ever upon him.

So they turned thus soon even in that last sunshine, and entering the cottage, sat before the smouldering peat-fire; he brooding darkly, Lora dreaming through her slow-welling tears, and both ... waiting.

Though, at dusk, a heavy sea still ran, it was partly due to the surge of the ground-swell and to the turbulence of the tide, for there was but little wind even away from the shelter of the isle, and what there was came mostly in short, sudden puffs and wandering breaths.

In the quietude of the gloaming, it was as though the sea called all round Innisròn as a beast of prey stalks about a high sheepfold, growling, breathing heavily, ravaging.

After the supper, eaten frugally and in silence, Lora and Alastair listened once again to the peat-prayer and the Blessing of Peace of Mrs. Maclean; then, not daring to say any word to her but that of a husky farewell for the night, and fearful even of meeting the glance of her quiet eyes, they went to their room, there to sit silently awhile in the darkness, hand in hand.

No one saw them leave the cottage an hour later: not a soul heard them as they passed through the clachan.

The road they chose was that sheep-path through the heather which led to Ardfeulan by the Glen of the Dark Water. Each knew the way well, otherwise their faring westward would have been difficult, for the sky was veiled by a thin mist and the moon was not visible.

They walked in silence; sometimes Lora in advance, but, whenever practicable, together, and hand in hand.

At last they reached the Glen of the Dark Water, and perceived through the gloaming the sheiling of Ealasaid MacAodh. This they skirted, and then entered a sloping hollow, at the base of which was audible the hoarse murmuring of the sea. Lora knew the place well. A week ago she had been there with Alastair, and remembered that the whole slope was a mass of moonflowers, tall, white, and so close-clustered that the green stems could hardly be seen.<sup>2</sup>

The wan glimmer of them was perceptible now, like the milky way on a night when a faint frost-mist prevails. Around, there was nothing else visible. Not a tree grew in that place: not a crag rose out of the sea of death-white blooms. The low-hanging mist-cloud veiled all things. It was as though the grave had been passed, and this was the gloom of the Death-sleep land that lies beyond. Only *there* is eternal silence: here, the dull menace of the sea made a ceaseless murmur about the obscure coasts.

As they entered the valley of moonflowers, dimly seeing their way a few yards beyond them, and hearkening to the inwash and resurgence of the tide moving along the extreme frontiers of the land, a sense of unspeakable dread came over Alastair and Lora.

They stood still, hardly daring to breathe. Both vaguely remembered something: they knew not what, save that the tragic memory was linked with reminiscence of a valley of moonflowers seen in a dark twilight. Was it all a dream, coincident in their minds? Or had life once before, in some unremembered state, wrought tragic issues for them by a valley of white flowers seen in the darkness, with a deeper darkness around, a veiled sky above, and the hoarse, confused prophesying of the sea beyond?

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<sup>2</sup> A tall, cream-white marguérite, native to the Outer Isles and the Hebrides, is known to the Islanders as the Moonflower.

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