

SIR HALL CAINE

SHE'S ALL THE WORLD TO
ME

Hall Caine

She's All the World to Me

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She's All the World to Me

PROEM

This is the story of how a woman's love triumphed over neglect and wrong, and of how the unrequited passion in the great heart of a boy trod its devious paths in the way to death, until it stood alone with its burden of sin before God and the pitiless deep.

In the middle of the Irish Sea there is, as every one knows, an island which for many ages has had its own people, with their own language and laws, their own judges and governor, their own lords and kings, their own customs and superstitions, their own proverbs and saws, their own ballads and songs. On the west coast of the Isle of Man stands the town of Peel. Though clean and sweet, it is not even yet much of a place to look at with its nooks and corners, its blind lanes and dark alleys, its narrow, crooked, crabbed streets. Thirty-five years ago it was a poor little hungry fishing port, chill and cheerless enough, staring straight out over miles and miles of bleak sea. To the north of Peel stretches a broad shore; to the south lies the harbor with a rocky headland and bare mountain beyond. In front – divided from the mainland by a narrow strait – is a rugged island rock, on which stand the ruins of a castle. At the back rises a gentle slope dotted over with gray houses.

This is the scene of the following history of the love that was won and the love that was lost, of death that had no sting and the grave that had no victory. Wild and eery as the coast on which I learned it is this story of love and death; but it is true as Truth and what it owes to him who writes it now with feelings deeper than he can say is less than it asks of all by whom it is read in sympathy and simple faith.

CHAPTER I

MYLREA BALLADHOO

The season was early summer; the year 1850. The morning had been bright and calm, but a mist had crept up from the sea as the day wore on, and the night, when it came, was close, dark, and dumb. Laden with its salt scent, the dank vapor had enveloped an old house on the "brew" behind the town. It was a curious place – ugly, long, loose, and straggling. One might say it was a featureless and irresolute old fabric. Over the porch was printed, "Prepare to meet thy God." It was called Balladhoo, and, with its lands, it had been for ages the holding of the Mylreas, an ancient Manx family, once rich and consequently revered, now notoriously less wealthy and proportionately more fallible.

In this house there was a parlor that faced the bay and looked out towards the old castle and the pier at the mouth of the harbor. Over the mantel-piece was carved "God's Providence is Mine Inheritance." One might add that it was a melancholy old mansion.

A gentleman was busy at a table in the bay window sorting and arranging papers by the last glimmering daylight. He was a man of sixty-five, stout, yet flaccid, and slack, and wearing a suit of coarse blue homespun that lay loosely upon him. His white hair hung about a face that bespoke an unusual combination of traits. The eyes and forehead were full of benevolence, but the mouth was alternately strong and weak, harsh and tender, uncertain whether the proper function of its mobile corners was to turn up in laughter or down in disdain.

This was Evan Mylrea, member of the House of Keys, Harbor Commissioner, and boat-owner, philanthropist and magistrate, coroner, constable and "local" for the Wesleyan body, and commonly known by his surname coupled with the name of his estate – Mylrea Balladhoo. Mylrea Balladhoo did not belie his face. He was the sort of man who gives his dog one blow for snapping at his hand, and then two more for not coming back to be caressed. Rightly understood, the theory of morals that an act like this implies tells the whole story of Mylrea's life and character, so far as either of these concerns the present history. It was the rule on which this man, now grown old, had lived with the young, reckless, light-hearted, thoughtless, beautiful, and darling wife whom he had brought from England thirty years ago, and buried at home five years afterwards. It was the principle on which he had brought up her only son.

Just now there came from some remote part of the house the most doleful wails that ever arrested mortal ears. At times they resembled the scream of the cormorant as he wheels over a rock at sea. At other times they recalled more precisely the plaintive appeal of the tailless tabby when she is pressed hard for time and space. Mylrea Balladhoo was conscious of these noises. Glancing once at his face, you might have thought it had dropped to a stern frown. Glancing twice, you must have seen that it had risen to a broad grin. One might certainly say that this was a gruesome dwelling.

There was a loud banging of doors, the distant screeches were suddenly abridged; there was the tread of an uncertain foot in the passage without, the door opened, and an elderly man entered, carrying a lamp, which he placed on the table. It was James Quark, the gardener, commonly called Jemmy Balladhoo. That mention of the cormorant was lucky; this man's eyes had just the sea-bird's wild stare. The two little gray-green globes of fire were, however, set in a face of the most flabby amiability. His hair, which was thin and weak, traveled straight down his forehead due for his eyes. In one hand he carried something by the neck, which, as he entered, he made late and futile efforts to conceal behind his back.

"It's Mr. Kerruish Kinvig, sir, that's coming up to see you," said the man in a meek voice.

"Show him in," said Mylrea Balladhoo; "and, Jemmy," he added, shouting in the man's ear, "for mercy's sake take that fiddle to the barn."

"Take him to the barn?" said Jemmy, with an affrighted stare. "Why, it's coming here he is, this very minute."

"The fiddle, the fiddle!" shouted Mr. Mylrea. "I always had my doubts about the music that's in it, and now I see there's none."

Jemmy took himself off, carrying his fiddle very tenderly in both hands. He was all but stone deaf, poor fellow, and had never yet known the full enjoyment of his own music. That's why he was so liberal of it with people more happily endowed.

A big blustering fellow then dashed into the parlor without ceremony.

"Balladhoo," he shouted, in a voice that rang through the house, "why don't you have the life of that howling demon? Here, take my clasp-knife at it and silence it forever."

"It's gone to the barn," said Mylrea Balladhoo, quietly, in reply to these bloodthirsty proposals.

The newcomer, Kerruish Kinvig, was a prosperous net-maker in Peel, and a thorn in the side of every public official within a radius of miles. The joy of his life was to have a delightful row with a magistrate, a coroner, a commissioner, or perhaps a parson by preference. When there was never a public meeting to be interrupted, never a "vestry" to be broken up, Kerruish Kinvig became as flat and stale as an old dog, and was forced to come up and visit his friend Mylrea Balladhoo, just by way of keeping his hand in.

On the present occasion he had scarcely seated himself, when he leaped up, rushed to the window, peered into the night, and shouted that the light on the harbor pier was out once more. He declared that this was the third time within a month; prophesied endless catastrophes; didn't know for his part what in the name of common-sense the commissioners were about; could swear that smuggling was going on under their very noses.

"I'll have the law on the lot of you," bellowed Kinvig at the full pitch of his voice, and meantime he helped himself to the whisky on the table, and filled his pipe from the domestic bowl. "It's the truth, I'll fling you all out," he shouted through a cloud of smoke.

"Eh, you'll have your fling," replied the unperturbed Mylrea.

Then, going to the door, the master of Balladhoo recalled the gardener.

From the subsequent conversation it appeared that, to prevent illicit trading, the Imperial Government had been compelled to station a cutter in every harbor of the island; that the cutter stationed at Peel, having come by some injury a month ago, had been removed to England for repairs, and had not yet been brought back. Kerruish Kinvig declared that some gang of scoundrels, perceiving the incompetence of the home officials, were availing themselves of the absence of the Government ship to run vessels laden with contraband goods under the cover of the darkness.

Jemmy came back, and Mr. Mylrea sent him to fetch his son Christian.

Jemmy went off for that purpose.

Some talk of the young man then ensued between his father and Kinvig. It transpired that Christian had had a somewhat questionable career – was his father's only son, and had well-nigh ruined the old man with debts contracted during a mysterious absence of six years. Christian had just returned home, and Mylrea Balladhoo, stern on the outside, tender at the core, loving his son as the one thing left to him to love, had forgiven everything – disgrace, ingratitude, and impoverishment – and taken back the prodigal without a word.

And, in truth, there was something so winsome in the young fellow's reckless, devil-may-care indifference that he got at the right side of people's affections in spite of themselves. Only those who come close to this type of character can recognise the rift of weakness or wilfulness, or it may be of selfishness, that runs through the fair vein of so much good-nature. And if Mylrea Balladhoo saw nothing, who then should complain?

Now, Kerruish Kinvig was just as fond of Christian as anybody else, but that was no just cause and impediment why he should hold his peace as to the young man's manifold weaknesses. So it was —

"Look here, Balladhoo. I've something to say about that fine son of yours, and it's middling strange too."

"Drop it, Kerruish," muttered Mylrea.

"So I will, but it's into your ear I'll drop it. Do you know he's hanging round one of my net-makers – eh?"

"You're fond of a spell at the joking, Kerruish, but in a general way, you know, a man doesn't like to look like a fool. You've got too much fun in you, Kerruish; that's *your* fault, and I've always said so."

There was a twinkle in the old man's eye, but it went off like summer lightning. "Who is she?" he asked, in another tone.

"Mona Cregeen they're calling her," said Kinvig.

"What is she?"

"Don't I tell you – one of my net-makers!" thundered Kinvig.

"Who are her people? Where does she come from? What do you know about her? What has Christian had to say to her – "

"Hold on; that's a middling tidy lot to begin with," shouted Kinvig.

Then it was explained that Mona Cregeen was a young woman of perhaps three-and-twenty, who had recently come to Peel from somewhere in the south of the island, accompanied by her aged mother and little sister, a child of five, closely resembling her.

Jemmy, the gardener, returned to say that Christian was not at home; left an hour ago; said he would be back before bedtime.

"Ah! it's the 'Jolly Herrings' he's off to," said Kinvig. The "Jolly Herrings" was a low hovel of an inn down in the town.

"As I say, you've a fine feeling for the fun, Kerruish," said Mylrea; "Jemmy, put on your coat quick. You have to carry a message to the harbor-master. It can't wait for Master Christian."

Now, Jemmy Balladhoo had, as we have seen, one weakness, but it was not work. He remembered quite opportunely that there was a boy in the kitchen who had just come up on an errand from the town, and must of course go back again. It was quite an inspiration, but none the less plainly evident that the boy was the very person to carry the message to the harbor-master.

"Who is he?" shouted Kerruish Kinvig.

"Danny Fayle," answered Jemmy.

"Pshaw! he'll never get there," bawled Kinvig.

"Bring him up," said Mylrea Balladhoo.

A minute later, a fisher-lad of eighteen shambled into the room. You might have said he was long rather than tall. He wore a guernsey and fumbled with a soft blue seaman's cap in one hand. His fair hair clustered in tangled curls over his face, which was sweet and comely, but had a simple vacant look from a lagging lower lip.

Danny was an orphan, and had been brought up none too tenderly by an uncle and aunt. The uncle, Bill Kisseck, was admiral of the fishing-fleet, and master of a fishing-lugger belonging to Mr. Mylrea. To-morrow was to be the first day of the herring season, and it was relative to that event that Danny had been sent up to Balladhoo. The lad received from Mr. Mylrea, in his capacity as harbor commissioner, a message of stern reproof and warning, which he was to convey to the official whose lack of watchfulness had allowed the light on the harbor pier to go out.

"Run straight to his house, Danny, my lad," said Mylrea Balladhoo.

"And don't go cooling your heels round that cottage of the Cregeens," put in Kerruish Kinvig.

A faint smile that had rested like a ray of pale sunshine on the lad's simple face suddenly vanished. He hung his head, touched his forehead with the hand holding the cap, and disappeared.

CHAPTER II IN PEEL CASTLE

When Danny reached the outside of the house, the night was even more dark and dumb than before. He turned to the right under the hill known as the Giant's Fingers, and took the cliff road to the town. The deep boom of the waters rolling slowly on the sand below came up to him through the dense air. He could hear the little sandpiper screaming at Orry's Head across the bay. The sea-swallow shot past him, too, with its low mournful cry. Save for these, everything was still.

Danny had walked about a quarter of a mile, when he paused for a moment at the gate of a cottage that stood halfway down the hill to the town. There was a light in the kitchen, and from where he stood in the road Danny could see those who were within. As if by an involuntary movement, his cap was lifted from his head and fumbled in his fingers, while his eyes gazed yearningly in at the curtainless window. Then he remembered the harsh word of Kerruish Kinvig, and started off again more rapidly. It was as though he had been kneeling at a fair shrine when a cruel hand befouled and blurred it.

Danny was superstitious. He was full to the throat of fairy lore and stories of witchcraft. The night was dark; the road was lonely; hardly a sound save that of his own footsteps broke the stillness, and the ghostly memories would arise. To banish them Danny began to whistle, and, failing with that form of musical society, to sing. His selection of a song was not the happiest under the circumstances. Oddly enough, it was the doleful ballad of Myle Charaine. Danny sang it in Manx, but here is a stave of it in the lusty tones of the fine old "Lavengro" —

"O, Myle Charaine, where got you your gold?
Lone, lone, you have left me here.
O, not in the curragh, deep under the mold,
Lone, lone, and void of cheer."

There was not much cheer that Danny could get out of Myle Charaine's company, but he could not at the moment think of any ballad hero who was much more heartsome. He had a good step of the road to go yet. Somehow the wild legend of the Moddey Dhoo would creep up into Danny's mind. In the days when the old castle was garrisoned, the soldiers in the guardroom were curious about a strange black dog that came every night and lay in their midst. "It's a devil," said one. "I'll follow it and see," said another. When the dog arose to go, the intrepid soldier went out after it. His comrades tried to prevent him. "I'll follow it," he said, "if it leads to hell." A minute afterward there was an unearthly scream; the soldier rushed back pale as a corpse, and with great staring eyes. He said not a word, and died within the hour. The Moddey Dhoo kept tormenting poor Danny to-night. So he set up the song afresh, and to heighten the sportive soul of it, he began to run. Once having taken to his heels, Danny ran as if the black dog itself had been behind him. By the time he reached the town he was fairly spent. Myle Charaine and the Moddey Dhoo together had been too much for Danny. What with the combined exertion of legs and lungs, the lad was perspiring from head to foot.

The house of the harbor-master was a little ivy-covered cottage that stood on the east end of the quay, near the bridge that crossed the river. The harbor-master himself was an unmarried elderly man, who enjoyed the curious distinction of having always worn short petticoats. His full and correct name seems almost to have been lost. He was known as Tommy-Bill-beg, a by-name which had at least a certain genealogical value in showing that the harbor-master was Tommy the son of Little Bill. When Danny reached the cottage he knocked, and had no answer. Then he lifted the latch and walked in. The house was empty, though a light was burning. It had two rooms and no more. One was

a dark closet of a sleeping-crib. The other, the living room, was choked with nearly every conceivable article of furniture and species of domestic ornament. Shells, fish-bones, bits of iron and lead ore, sticks and pipes lay on tables, chairs, chests, settles, and corner cupboards. A three-legged stool stood before the fire-place; and with all his wealth of rickety furniture, this was probably the sole article which the harbor-master used.

There was a facetious-faced timepiece on the mantel-piece; and when folks pitied the isolation of Tommy-Bill-beg, and asked him if he never felt lonely, he always replied, "Not while I hear the clock tick." But Tommy-Bill-beg had not heard the clock tick for twenty years. He resembled Jemmy Quark in being almost stone-deaf, and had a further bond of union with the gardener of Balladhoo in being musical. He played no instrument, however, except his voice, which he believed to be of the finest quality and compass. The harbor-master was wofully wrong as to the former, but right as to the latter; he had a voice like a rasp, and as loud as a fog-horn. Printed copies of ballads were pinned up on various parts of the wall of his kitchen. Tommy-Bill-beg could not read a line; but he would rather have died than allow that this was so, and he never sang except from print.

Danny Fayle knew well how often the musical weakness of the harbor-master was played upon by the Peel men; and when he found the cottage empty he suspected that some wags of fisher-fellows had decoyed Tommy-Bill-beg away to the "Jolly Herrings" for the sport of having him sing on this their last night ashore. Danny set off for the inn, which was in Castle Street. He walked along the quay, intending to turn up a passage.

The night seemed darker than ever now, and not a breath of wind was stirring. The harbor on Danny's left was some twenty yards across, and another twenty yards divided the mainland from the island rock, on which stood the ruins of the old fortress. The tide was out, and the fishing-luggers lay at secure anchorage on the shingle, and in six inches of mud. The pier was straight ahead, and there the light should now be burning.

As Danny approached the passage that led up to Castle Street he heard the distant rumble of noisy singing. Yes, it came from the "Jolly Herrings" beyond question, and Tommy-Bill-beg was there airing his single vanity.

Danny was about to turn up the passage when, in a lull in the singing, he thought he caught the sound of voices and of the tread of feet. Both came from the rock outside, and Danny could not resist the temptation to walk on and listen.

There could be no doubt of it. Some people were going up to the castle. What could they want in that desolate place at night, and thus late? In Danny's mind the ancient castle had always been encircled by ghostly imaginings. Perhaps it was fear that drew him to it now. Probably ordinary common-sense would have suggested that Danny should run off first to the harbor-master with the message that he had been charged to deliver, but Danny had neither part nor lot in that ordinary inheritance.

Near the bottom of the ebb tide the neck that divided the pier from the castle could be forded. Danny stole down the pier steps and crossed the ford as noiselessly as he could. A flight of other steps hewn out of the rock went up from the water's edge to the deep portcullis. Danny crept up. He found that the old notched and barred door leading into the castle stood open. Danny stood and listened. The footsteps that he heard before were now far ahead of him. It was darkest of all under these thick walls. Danny had to pass the doorway of the ruined guardroom, terrible with the tradition of the black dog. As he went by the door he turned his head toward it in the darkness. At that instant he thought he heard something stir. He gasped, but could not scream. He stretched his arms fearfully toward the sound. There was nothing. All was still once more; only the receding footsteps dying away. Danny thought he had deceived himself. It was as though he had heard the rustle of a dress, but it must have been the soft rustle of leaves.

Yet there were no trees in the castle.

Danny stepped forward into the courtyard. His feet fell softly on the grass that now grew there. But he stopped again, and his heart seemed to stand still. He could have sworn that behind him he heard a light stealthy tread. Danny dropped to his knees, breathless and trembling.

It was gone. The deep, thick boom of the sea came from the shore far behind, and the thin, low splash of broken waters from the rocks beneath. The footsteps had ceased now, but Danny could hear voices. He rose to his feet and walked toward whence they came.

He found himself outside the crumbling walls of the roofless chapel of St. Patrick. He heard noises from within, and crouched behind a stone. Presently a light was struck. It lighted all the air above it. Danny crept up to the chapel wall and peered in at one of the lancet windows.

A company of men were there, but he could not distinguish their faces. The single lantern they carried was now turned with its face to the ground. One of them had a crowbar with which he was prizing up a stone. It was a gravestone. The men were tearing open an old vault.

There was some muttering, and one of the men seemed to protest. "Stop!" he cried; "I'm not going to have a hand in a job like this. I'm bad enough, God knows, but no man shall say that I helped to violate a grave."

Danny shook from head to foot. He knew that voice. Just then the sea-swallow shot again overhead, uttering its low, mournful cry. At the same instant Danny thought he heard a half-stiffed moan not far from his side, and once more his ear caught that soft rustling sound. Quivering in every limb, he could not stir. He must stand and be silent. He clung to the stone wall with convulsive fingers.

The man with the crowbar laughed. "Dowse that now," he said, and laughed again.

"Och, the timid he is to be sure, and the religious, too, all at once."

Danny knew that voice also, and knew as well that to utter a word or sound at that moment might be as much as his life was worth. The men were raising the stone.

"Here, bear a hand," said one.

"Never," said the first speaker.

There was a low, grating laugh. One of the men leaped into the vault.

"Now, then, tail on here more hands. Let's have it, quick."

Then Danny saw that, lying on the ground, was something that he had not observed before. It was like a thick black roll some four feet long. Two of the men got hold of it to hand it to the man below.

"Come! lay down, d'ye hear?"

Danny's terror mastered him. He turned to run. Then the man who had spoken first cried, "What's that?"

There was a moment's pause.

"What's what?" said the man in the vault.

"I'll swear on my soul I saw a woman pass the porch."

A bitter little laugh followed.

"Och, it's always a woman he's seeing."

Danny had found his legs at last. Flying along the grass as softly as a lapwing, he reached the old gate. Then he turned and listened. No; there was nothing to show that he had been heard. He crept down the steps to the water's edge. There in a creek he saw a boat which he had not observed on going up. He looked at the name.

It was "Ben-my-Chree."

Danny turned to the ford. The tide had risen a foot since he crossed, but he paddled through the water and gained the pier. Then he ran home as fast as his long legs would carry him, wet with sweat and speechless with dismay.

Next morning Danny remembered that he had forgotten all about the harbor-master and the light.

"Och, the cursed young imp that he is," cried his uncle, Bill Kisseck, hitching his hand into Danny's guernsey at the neck, and steadying him as if he had been a sack with an open mouth. "Aw, the booby; just taking a rovin' commission and snappin' his finger at the ould masther. What d'ye think would a happent to you, ye beach-comber, if some ship had run ashore and been wrecked and scuttled and all hands lost, and not a pound of cargo left at her, and never a light on the pier, and all along of you, ye idiot waistrel!"

CHAPTER III

"MACK'REL – MACKER-EL – MACK-ER-EL!"

It was a brilliant morning. The sea lay like a glass floor, and the sunshine, like a million fairies, danced on it. The town looked as bright as it was possible for Peel to look. The smoke was only beginning to coil upward from the chimney stacks and the streets were yet quiet when the silvery voice of a child was heard to cry —

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

It was a little auburn-haired lassie of five, with ruddy cheeks, and laughing lips, and sparkling brown eyes. She wore a clean white apron that covered her skirt, which was tucked up and pinned in fish-wife fashion in front. Her head was bare; she carried a basket over one arm, and a straw hat that swung on the other hand.

The basket contained flowers which the child was selling: "A ha'penny a bunch, ma'am, only a ha'penny!" The little thing was as bright as the sunlight that glistened over her head. She had made a song of her sweet call, and chanted the simple words with a rhythmic swing —

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

"Ruby," cried a gentleman at the door of a house facing the sea. "Here, little one, give me a bunch of your falderolls. What? No! not falderolls? Is that it, little one, eh?"

It was Mr. Kerruish Kinvig.

The child pouted prettily and drew back her basket.

"What! not sell to me this morning! Oh, I see you choose *your* customers, *you* do, my lady. But I'll have the law on you, I will."

Ruby looked up fearlessly into the face of the dread iconoclast.

"I don't love you," she said.

"No – eh? And why not, now?"

"Because you call the flowers bad names."

"Oh, I do, do I? Well never mind, little one. Say we strike a peace – eh?"

"I don't like people that strike," said Ruby, with averted eyes.

"Well, then, cry a truce – anything you like."

Ruby knew what crying a flower or a fish meant.

"Here, now, little one, here's a penny; that's double wages, you know. Don't you think the law would uphold me if I asked for a – "

"A what?" asked the child, with innocent eyes.

"Well, say a kiss."

The bargain was concluded and the purchase ratified. In another minute the little feet were tripping away, and from a side street came the silvery voice that sang —

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

At the next corner the lassie's childlike tones were suddenly drowned by a lustier voice which cried, "Mack'rel! Macker – el! Fine, ladies – fresh, ladies – and bellies as big as bishops' – Mack – er – el!"

It was Danny Fayle with a board on his head containing his last instalment of the season's mackerel. When the two street-venders came together they stopped.

"Aw now, the fresh you're looking this morning, Ruby veg – as fresh as a dewdrop, my chree!"

The little one lifted her eyes and laughed. Then she plunged her hand into her basket and brought out a bunch of wild roses.

"That's for you, Danny," she said.

"Och, for me is it now? Aw, and is it for me it is?" said Danny, with wondering eyes. "The clean ruined it would be in half a minute, though, at the likes of me, Ruby veg. Keep it for yourself, woman." *Louder*: "Mack'rel – fine, ladies – fresh, ladies – Macker-el!" *Then lower*: "Aw now, the sweet and tidy they'd be lookin' in your own breast, my chree – the sweet extraordinary!"

The child looked up and smiled, looked down and pondered: then half reluctantly, half coquettishly, fixed the flowers in her bosom.

"Danny, I love you," she said, simply.

The object of Ruby's affection blushed violently and was silent.

"And so does Sissy," added the little one.

"Mona?" asked Danny, and his tongue seemed to cleave to his mouth.

"Yes, and mama too."

Danny's face, which had begun to brighten, suddenly lost its sunshine. His lower lip was lagging wofully.

"Yes, Mona and mama, and – and everybody," said the child, with ungrudging spontaneity.

"No, Ruby ven."

Danny's voice was breaking. He tried to conquer this weakness by shouting aloud, "Mack-er – Mack – " Then, in a softer tone, "Not everybody, my chree."

"Well," said the child in earnest defense, "everybody except your uncle Kisseck."

"Bill? Bill? What about Bill?" said Danny, hoarsely.

"Why don't you fight into him, Danny? You're a big boy now, Danny. Why don't you fight into him?"

Danny's simple face grew very grave. The soft blue eyes had an uncertain look.

"Did Sissy say that, Ruby veg?"

"No, but she said Bill Kisseck was a – was a – "

"A what, Rue?"

"A brute – to *you*, Danny."

The lad's face trembled. The hanging lower lip quivered, and the whole countenance became charged with sudden energy. Lifting his board from his head, and taking up the finest of the fish, he said:

"Ruby, take this home to Mona. Here now; it's at the bottom of your basket I'm putting it."

"My flowers, Danny!" cried Ruby, anxiously.

"Aw, what's the harm they'll take at all. There – there" (fixing some seaweed over the mackerel) – "nice, extraordinary – nice, nice!"

"But what will your uncle Bill say, Danny?" asked the little one with the shadow of fear in her eyes.

"Bill? Bill? Oh, Bill," said Danny, turning away his eyes for a moment. Then, with an access of strength as he lifted his board onto his head and turned to go, "if Bill says anything, I'll – I'll – "

"No, don't, Danny; no, don't," cried Ruby, the tears rising to her eyes.

"Just a minute since," said Danny, "there came a sort of a flash, like that" (he swung one arm across his eyes), "and all of a sudden I knew middlin' well what to do with Bill."

"Don't fight, Danny," cried Ruby; but Danny was gone, and from another street came "Mack'rel – fine, ladies – fresh, ladies – and bellies as big as bishops' – Mack-er-el!"

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST OF "THE HERRINGS"

Later in the day the final preparations were being made for the departure of the herring fleet. Tommy-Bill-beg, the harbor-master, in his short petticoat, was bawling all over the quay, first at this man in the harbor and then at that. Bill Kisseck was also there in his capacity as admiral of the fleet – an insular office for which he had been duly sworn in, and for which he received his five pounds a year. Bill was a big black-bearded creature in top-boots – a relic of the reign of the Norseman in Man. Tommy-Bill-beg was chaffed about the light going out on the pier. He looked grave, declared there was "something in it." Something supernatural, Tommy meant. Tommy-Bill-beg believed in his heart it was "all along of the spite of Gentleman Johnny" – now a bogey, erst a thief who in the flesh had been put into a spiked barrel and rolled over the pier into the sea, swearing furiously, as long as he could be heard, that to prove his innocence it was his fixed intention to haunt forever the scene of his martyrdom.

Kerruish Kinvig was standing by, and heard the harbor-master's explanation of the going out of the light.

"It's middling strange," shouted Kinvig, "that the ghost should potter about only when the Government cutter happens to be out of the way, and Tommy-Bill-beg is yelping and screeching at the 'Jolly Herrings.' I'd have a law on such bogies, and clap them in Castle Rushen," bawled Kinvig, "and all the fiddlers and carol-singers along with them," he added.

The harbor-master shook his head, apparently more in sorrow than in anger, and whispered Bill Kisseck that, as "the good ould book" says, "Bad is the man that has never no music in his sowl."

It was one of Tommy-Bill-beg's peculiarities of mental twist that he was full of quotations, and never by any chance failed to misascribe, misquote, and misapply them.

The fishing-boats were rolling gently with the motion of the rising tide. When everything had been made ready, and the flood was at hand, the fishermen, to the number of several hundred men and boys, trooped off to the shore of the bay. There they were joined by a great multitude of women and children. Presently the vicar appeared, and, standing in an open boat, he offered the customary prayer for the blessing of God on the fishing expedition which was now setting out.

"Restore and continue to us the harvest of the sea!"

And the men, on their knees in the sand, with uncovered heads, and faces in their hats, murmured "*Yn Meailley*."

Then they separated, the fishermen returning to their boats.

Bill Kisseck leaped aboard the lugger that lay at the mouth of the harbor. His six men followed him. "See all clear," he shouted to Danny, who sailed with him as boy. Danny stood on the quay with the duty of clearing ropes from blocks, and then following in the dingey that was moored to the steps.

Among the women who had come down to the harbor to see the departure of the fleet were two who bore no very close resemblance to the great body of the townswomen. One was an elderly woman, with a thin sad face. The other was a young women, of perhaps two or three and twenty, tall and muscular, with a pale cast of countenance, large brown eyes, and rich auburn hair. The face, though strong and beautiful, was not radiant with happiness, and yet it recalled very vividly a glint of human sunshine that we have known before.

In another moment little Ruby, red with running, pranced up to their side, crying, "Mona, come and see Danny Fayle's boat. Here, look, there; that one with the color on the deck."

The admiral's boat was to carry a flag.

The two women were pulled along by the little sprite and stopped just where Danny himself was untying a knot in a rope. Danny recognized them, lifted his hat, blushed, looked confused, and seemed for the moment to forget the cable.

"Tail on there!" shouted Bill Kisseck from the lugger. "Show a leg there, if you don't want the rat's tail. D'ye hear?"

Danny was fumbling with his cap. That poor lagging lower lip was giving a yearning look to the lad's simple face. He muttered some commonplace to Mona, and then dropped his head. At that instant his eyes fell on the lower part of her dress. The blue serge of her gown was bleached near her feet. Danny, who could think of nothing else to say, mumbled something about the salt water having taken the color out of Mona's dress. The girl looked down, and then said quietly:

"Yes, I was caught by the tide last night – I mean to say, I was – "

She was clearly trying to recall her words, but poor Danny had hardly heard them.

"You cursed booby!" cried Bill Kisseck, leaping ashore, "prating with a pack of women when I'm a-waiting for you. I'll make you walk handsome over the bricks, my man."

With that he struck Danny a terrible blow and felled him.

The lad got up abashed, and without a word turned to his work. Kisseck, still in a tempest of wrath, was leaping back to the lugger, when the young woman stepped up to him, looked fearlessly in his face, seemed about to speak, checked herself, and turned away.

Kisseck stood measuring her from head to foot with his eyes, broke into a little bitter laugh, and said:

"I'm right up and down like a yard of pumpwater; that's what I am."

He jumped aboard again. Danny ran the rope from the blocks, the admiral's boat cleared away, and the flag shot up to the mast-head. The other boats followed one after one to the number of nearly one hundred. The bay was full of them.

When Kisseck's boat had cleared the harbor, Danny ran down the steps of the pier with eyes still averted from the two women and the child, got into the dingey, took an oar and began to scull after it.

"Sissy, Sissy," cried Ruby, tugging at Mona's dress, "look at Danny's little boat. What's the name that is on it in red letters?"

"Ben-my-Chree," the young woman answered.

Then the herring fleet sailed away under the glow of the setting sun.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTIAN MYLREA

It was late when young Christian Mylrea got back to Balladhoo that night of Kerruish Kinvig's visit. "I've been up for a walk to the Monument on Horse Hill," he remarked, carelessly, as he sat down at the piano and touched it lightly to the tune of "Drink to me only with thine eyes." "Poor old Corrin," he said, pausing with two fingers on the keyboard, "what a crazy old heretic he must have been to elect to bury himself up yonder." Then, in a rich full tenor, Christian sang a bar or two of "Sally in our Alley."

The two older men were still seated at opposite sides of the table smoking leisurely. Mylrea Balladhoo told Christian of the errand on which he had wished to send him.

"The light? Ah, yes," said Christian, turning his head between the rests in his song, "curious, that, wasn't it? Do you know that coming round by the pier I noticed that the light had gone out; so" – (a run up the piano) – "so, after ineffectual attempts to rouse that sad dog of a harbor-master of yours, dad, I went up into the box and lit it myself. You see it's burning now."

"Humph! so it is," grunted Kerruish Kinvig, who had got up in the hope of discrediting the statement.

"Only the wick run down, that was all," said Christian, who had turned to the piano again, and was rattling off a lively French catch.

Christian Mylrea was a handsome young fellow of five or six and twenty, with a refined expression and easy manner, educated, genial, somewhat irresolute one might say, with a weak corner to his mouth; naturally of a sportive disposition, but having an occasional cast of thoughtfulness; loving a laugh, but finding it rather apt of late to die away abruptly on his lips.

Getting up to go, Kinvig said, "Christian, my man, you've not seen my new net-looms since you came home. Wonderful inventions! Wonderful! Extraordinary! Talk of your locomotive – pshaw! Come down, man, and see them at work in the morning."

Christian reflected for a moment. "I will," he said, in a more serious tone than the occasion seemed to require. "Yes, I'll do that," he said.

"In the morning!" said Mylrea Balladhoo. "To-morrow is the first day of the herrings – no time for new net-looms to-morrow at all."

"The herrings!" shouted Kinvig from the door in an accent of high disdain.

"Nothing like leather," said Christian laughing. "Let it be the morning after," he added; and so it was agreed.

Next day Christian busied himself a little among the fishing-smacks that were the property of his father, or were, at least, known by his father's name. He went in and sat among the fisher-fellows with a cheery voice and pleasant face. Everywhere he was a favorite. When his back was turned it was: "None o' yer ransy-tansy-tisimitee about Misther Christian; none o' yer 'Well, my good man,' and the like o' that; awful big and could, sem as if they'd jist riz from the dead." Or perhaps, "No criss-crossing about the young mather; allis preachin'; and 'I'll kermoonicate yer bad behavior' and all that jaw." Or again, more plaintively, "I wish he were a bit more studdy-like, and savin'. Of coorse, of coorse, me and him's allis been middlin' well acquent."

CHAPTER VI

THE NET FACTORY

The morning after the fleet left the harbor, Christian walked down to Kerruish Kinvig's house, and together they went over the net factory. In a large room facing the sea a dozen hand-loom for the manufacture of drift-nets had been set up. Each loom was worked by a young woman, and she had three levers to keep in action – one with the hand and the others with the feet.

Kinvig explained, with all the ardor of an enthusiast, the manifold advantage of the new loom over the old one with which Christian was familiar; dwelt on the knots, the ties and the speed; exhibited a new reel for the unwinding of the cotton thread from the skein, and described a new method of barking when the nets come off the looms. Pausing now and then with the light of triumph in his eyes, he shouted, "Where's your Geordie Stephenson now? Eh?"

Christian listened with every appearance of rapt attention, and from time to time put questions which were at least respectably relevant. A quicker eye than Kerruish Kinvig's might perhaps have seen that the young man's attention was on the whole more occupied with the net-makers than with their looms, and that his quick gaze glanced from face to face with an inquiring expression.

A child of very tender years was working a little thread reel at the end of the room, and, on some pretense, Christian left Kinvig's side, stepped up to the child, and spoke to her about the click-clack of the levers and cranks. The little woman lifted her head to reply; but having a full view of her face, Christian turned away without waiting for her answer.

After a quarter of an hour, all Christian's show of interest could not quite conceal a look of weariness. One would have said that he had somehow been disappointed in this factory and its contents. Something that he had expected to see he had not seen. Just then Kinvig announced that the choicest of his looms was in another room. This one would not only make a special knot, but would cut and finish.

"It is a delicate instrument, and wants great care in the working," said Kinvig. In that regard the net-maker considered himself fortunate, for he had just hit on a wonderfully smart young woman who could work it as well, Kinvig verily believed, as he could work it himself.

"Who is she?" said Christian.

"A stranger in these parts – came from the south somewhere – Castletown way," said Kinvig; and he added with a grin, "Haven't you heard of her?"

Christian gave no direct reply, but displayed the profoundest curiosity as to this latest development in net-making ingenuity. He was forthwith carried off to inspect Kinvig's first treasure in looms.

The two men stepped into a little room apart, and there, working at the only loom that the room contained, was little Ruby's sister, Mona Cregeen. The young woman was putting her foot on one of the lower treadles when they entered. She made a slight but perceptible start, and the lever went up with a bang.

"Tut, my girl, how's this?" said Kinvig. "See – you've let that line of meshes off the hooks."

The girl stopped, replaced the threads one after one with nervous fingers, and then proceeded with her work in silence.

Kinvig was beginning an elaborate engineering disquisition for Christian's benefit – Christian's head certainly did hang rather too low for Kinvig's satisfaction – when a girl comes in from the outer factory to say that a man at the gate would like to see the master.

"Botheration!" shouted Kinvig; "but wait here, Christian, and I'll be back." Then, turning to the young weaver – "Show this gentleman the action of the loom, my girl."

* * * * *

When the door had closed behind Mr. Kinvig, Christian raised his eyes to the young woman's face. There was silence between them for a moment. The window of the room was open, and the salt breath of the ocean floated in. The sea's deep murmur was all that could be heard between the clicks of the levers. Then Christian said, softly:

"Mona, have you decided? Will you go back?"

The girl lifted her eyes to his. "No," she answered, quietly.

"Think again, Mona; think of me. It isn't that I couldn't wish to have you here – always here – always with me –"

The girl gave a little hard laugh.

"But think of the risk!" continued Christian, more eagerly. "Is it nothing that I am tortured with suspense already, but that you should follow me?"

"And do *I* suffer nothing?" said she.

There was no laughter on Christian's lips now. The transformation to earnest pallor was startling.

"Think of my father," he said, evading the girl's question. "I have all but impoverished him already with my cursed follies, and little does he dream, poor old dad, of the utter ruin that yet hangs over his head."

There was a pause. Then, in a tenderer tone:

"Mona, don't add to my eternal worries. Go back to Derby Haven, like the dear girl that you are. And when this storm blows over – and it will soon be past – then all shall be made right. Yes, it shall, believe me."

There was no answer. Christian continued.

"Go at once, my girl. Here," (diving into his pockets), "I've precious little money left, God help me, but here's enough to pay your way, and something to spare."

He offered a purse in his palm. The girl tossed up his hand with a disdainful gesture.

"It's not money I want from you," she said. Christian looked at her for a moment with blank amazement. She caught the expression, and answered it with a haughty curl of the lip. The sneer died off her face on the instant, and the tears began to gather in her eyes.

"It's not love a girl wants, then?" she said struggling to curl her lip again. "It's not love, then, that a girl like me can want," she said.

She had stopped the loom and covered up her face in her hands.

"No, no," she added, with a stifled sob, "love is for ladies – fine ladies in silks and satins – pure – virtuous... Christian," she exclaimed, dropping her hands and looking into his face with indignant eyes, "I suppose there's a sort of woman that wants nothing of a man but money, is there?"

Christian's lips were livid. "That's not what I meant, Mona, believe me," he said.

The loom was still. The sweet serenity of the air left hardly a sense of motion.

"You talk of your father, too," the girl continued, lifting her voice. "What of my mother? You don't think of her. No, but I do, and it goes nigh to making my heart bleed."

"Hush, Mona," whispered Christian; but, heedless of the warning, she continued:

"To be torn away from the place where she was born and bred, where kith and kin still live, where kith and kin lie dead – that was hard. But it would have been harder, far harder, to remain, with shame cast at her from every face, as it has been every day for these five years."

She paused. A soft boom came up to them from the sea, where the unruffled waters rested under the morning sun.

"Yes, we have both suffered," said Christian. "What I have suffered God knows. Yes, yes; the man who lives two lives knows what it is to suffer. Talk of crime! no need of that, as the good, goody,

charitable world counts crime. Let it be only a hidden thing, that's enough. Only a secret, and yet how it kills the sunshine off the green fields!" Christian laughed – a hollow, hard, cynical laugh.

"To find the thing creep up behind every thought, lie in ambush behind every smile, break out in mockery behind every innocent laugh. To have the dark thing with you in the dark night. No sleep so sweet but that it is haunted by this nightmare. No dream so fair but that an ugly memory steals up at first awakening – that, yes, that is to suffer!"

Just then a flight of sea-gulls disporting on a rock in the bay sent up a wild, jabbering noise.

"To know that you are not the man men take you for; that dear souls that cling to you would shudder at your touch if the scales could fall from their eyes, or if for an instant – as by a flash of lightning – the mask fell from your face."

Christian's voice deepened, and he added:

"Yet to know that bad as one act of your life may have been, that life has not been all bad; that if men could but see you as Heaven sees you, perhaps – perhaps – you would have acquittal – "

His voice trembled and he stopped. Mona was gazing out over the sea with blurred eyes that saw nothing.

Christian had been resting one foot on the loom. Lifting himself he stamped on the floor, threw back his head with a sudden movement, and laughed again, slightly.

"Something too much of this," he said. Then sobering once more, "Go back, Mona. It shan't be for long. I swear to you it shan't. But what must I do with debts hanging over me – "

"I'll tell you what you must *not* do," said the girl with energy.

Christian's eyes but not his lips asked "What?"

"You must not link yourself with that Bill Kisseck and his Curragh gang."

A puzzled look crossed Christian's face.

"Oh, I know their doings, don't you doubt it," said the girl.

"What do you know of Bill Kisseck?" said Christian with some perceptible severity. "Tell me, Mona, what harm do you know of Bill and his – his gang, as you call them?"

"I know this – I know they'll be in Castle Rushen one of these fine days."

Christian looked relieved. With a cold smile he said, "I dare say you're right, Mona. They *are* a rough lot, the Curragh fellows; but no harm in them that I know of."

"Harm!" Mona had started the loom afresh, but she stopped once more. "Harm!" she exclaimed again. Then in a quieter way, "Keep away from them, Christian. You've seen too much of them of late."

Christian started.

"Oh, I know it. But you can't touch pitch – you mind the old saying."

Mona had again started the loom, and was rattling at the levers with more than ordinary energy. Christian watched her for a minute with conflicting feelings. He felt that his manhood was being put to a severe strain. Therefore, assuming as much masculine superiority of manner as he could command, he said:

"We'll not talk about things that you don't quite understand, Mona. What Kisseck may do is no affair of ours, unless I choose to join him in any enterprise, and then I'm the best judge, you know."

The girl stopped. Resting her elbow on the upper lever, and gazing absently out at the window where the light waves in the bay were glistening through a drowsy haze, she said, quietly:

"The man that I could choose out of all the world is not one who lives on his father and waits for the storm to blow over. No, nor one that clutches at every straw, no matter what. He's the man who'd put his hand to the boats, or the plow, or the reins; and if he hadn't enough to buy me a ribbon, I'd say to myself, proudly, 'That man loves me!'"

Christian winced. Then assuming afresh his loftier manner, "As I say, Mona, we won't talk of things you don't understand."

"I'll not go back!" said the girl, as if by a leap of thought. The loom was started afresh with vigor.

"Then let me beg of you to be secret," whispered Christian, coming close to her ear.

The girl laughed bitterly.

"Never fear," she said, "it's not for the woman to blab. No, the world is all for the man, and the law too. Men make the laws and women suffer under them – that's the way of it."

The girl laughed again, and continued in mocking tones, "'Poor fellow, he's been sorely tempted,' says the world; 'tut on her, never name her,' says the law."

And once more the girl forced a hollow, bitter laugh.

Just then a child's silvery voice was heard in the street beneath. The blithe call was —

"Sweet violets and primroses the sweetest."

The little feet tripped under the window. The loom stopped, and they listened. Then Christian looked into the young woman's face, and blinding tears rose on the instant into the eyes of both.

"Mona!" he cried, in low passionate tones, and opened his arms. There was an unspeakable language in her face. She turned her head toward him longingly, yearningly, with heaving breast. He took one step toward her. She drew back. "No – not yet!" His arms fell, and he turned away.

* * * * *

Then the voice of Kerruish Kinvig could be heard in the outer factory.

"I've been middling long," he said, hurrying in, "but a man, a bailiff from England, came bothering about some young waistrel that I never heard of in my born days – had run away from his debts, and so on – had been traced to the Isle of Man, and on here to Peel. And think of that tomfool of a Tommy-Bill-beg sending the man to me. I bowled him off to your father."

"My father!" exclaimed Christian, who had listened to Kinvig's rambling account with an uneasy manner.

"Yes, surely, and the likeliest man too. What's a magistrate for at all if private people are to be moidered like yonder? But come, I'll show you the sweet action of this loom in unwinding. Look now – see – keep your eye on those hooks."

And Kerruish Kinvig rattled on with his explanation to a deaf ear.

"Mr. Kinvig," interrupted Christian, "I happened to know that father is not risen yet this morning. That bailiff – "

"More shame for him; let him be roused anyhow. See here, though, press your hand on that level – so. Now when Mona puts down that other level – do you see? No! Why don't you look closer?"

"Mr. Kinvig, do you know I half fancy that young fellow the man was asking for must have been an old college chum of mine. If you wouldn't mind sending one of your girls after him to Balladhoo to ask him to meet me in half an hour at the harbor-master's cottage on the quay – "

"Here! Let it be here;" calling "Jane!"

"No, let it be on the quay," said Christian; "I have to go there presently, and it will save time, you know."

"Bless me, man! have you come to your saving days at last?"

Kinvig turned aside, instructed Jane, and resumed the thread of his technical explanations.

"Let me show you this knot again; that bum-bailiff creature was bothering you before. Look now – stand here – so."

"Yes," said Christian, with the resignation of a martyr.

Then Kinvig explained everything afresh, but with an enthusiasm that was sadly damped by Christian's manifest inability to command the complexities of the invention.

"I thought once that you were going to be a bit of an engineer yourself, Christian. Bless me, the amazing learned you were at the wheels, and the cranks, and the axles when you were a lad in jackets; but" – with a suspicious smile – "it's likely you're doing something in the theology line now, and

that's a sort of feeding and sucking and suction that won't go with the engineering anyhow." Christian smiled faintly, and Kinvig, as if by an after-thought shouted:

"Heigh-ho! Let's take the road for it. We've kept this young woman too long from her work already." (Going out.) "You didn't give her much of a spell at the work while I was away." (Outside.) "Oh, I saw the little bit of your sweethearting as I came back. But it's wrong, Christian. It's a shame, man, and a middling big one, too."

"What's a shame?" asked Christian, gasping out the inquiry.

"Why, to moider a girl with the sweethearting when she's got her living to make. How would *you* like it, eh? Middling well? Oh, *would* you? All piecework, you know; so much a piece of net, a hundred yards long and two hundred meshes deep; work from eight to eight; fourteen shillings a week, and a widowed mother to keep, and a little sister as well. How would you like it, eh?"

Christian shrugged his shoulders and hung his head.

"Tut, man alive, you fine fellows browsing on your lands, you scarce know you're born. Come down and mix among poor folks like this girl, and her mother, and the little lammie, and you'll begin to know you're alive."

"I dare say," muttered Christian, making longish strides to the outer gate. A broad grin crossed the face of Kerruish Kinvig as he added:

"But I tell you what, when you get your white choker under your gills, and you do come down among the like of these people with your tracts, and your hymns, and all those rigs, and your face uncommon solemn, and your voice like a gannet – none of your sweethearting, my man. Look at that girl Mona, now. It isn't reasonable to think you're not putting notions into the girl's head. It's a shame, man."

"You're right, Mr. Kinvig," said Christian, under his breath, "a cursed shame." And he stretched out his hand impatiently to bid good-by.

"No. I'll go with you to Tommy-Bill-beg's. Oh, don't mind me. I've nothing particular on hand, or I wouldn't waste my time on ye. Yes, as I say, it's wrong. Besides, Christian, what you want to do now is to marry a girl with a property. That's the only thing that will put yonder Balladhoo right again, and – in your ear, man – that's about what your father's looking for."

Christian winced, and then tried to laugh.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he said, absently.

"But leave the girls alone. They're amazin' like the ghos'es, are the girls; once you start them you never know where they'll stop, and they get into every skeleton closet about the house – but of course, of course, I'm an old bachelor, and as the saying is, I don't know nothin'!"

"Ha! ha! ha! of course not," laughed Christian with a tragic effort.

They had stopped outside the ivy cottage of the harbor-master, and that worthy, who was standing there, had overheard the last loud words of Kinvig's conversation.

"What do *you* say, Tommy-Bill-beg?" asked Kinvig, giving him a prod in the ribs.

"I say that the gels in these days ought to get wedded while they're babbies in arms – "

"That'll do, that'll do," shouted Kinvig with a roar of laughter.

At the same moment one of the factory girls appeared side by side with a stranger.

"Good-by, Mr. Kinvig," said Christian.

"Good-day," Kinvig answered; and then shouting to the stranger, "this gentleman knows something of the young vagabond you want."

"So I see," answered the stranger with a cold smile, and Christian and the stranger stepped apart.

When they parted, the stranger said, "Well, one month let it be, and not a day longer." Christian nodded his head in assent, and turned toward Balladhoo. After dinner he said:

"Father, I'd like to go out to the herrings this season. It would be a change."

"Humph!" grunted his father; "which boat?"

"Well, I thought of the 'Ben-my-Chree'; she's roomy, and, besides, she's the admiral's boat, and perhaps Kisseck wouldn't much like to hear that I'd sailed with another master."

"You'll soon tire of that amusement," mumbled Mylrea Balladhoo.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST OF "THE HERRINGS"

Some months later, as the season was chilling down to winter, the "Ben-my-Chree," with the fleet behind her, was setting out from Peel for her last night at "the herrings." On the deck, among others, was Christian Mylrea, in blue serge and guernsey, heavy sea-boots and sou'wester. It was past sundown; a smart breeze was blowing off the land as they rounded the Contrary Head and crossed the two streams that flow there. It was not yet too dark, however, to see the coast-line curved into covelets and promontories, and to look for miles over the hills where stretched the moles and hillocks of gorse and tussacs of long grass.

The twilight deepened as they rounded Niarbyl Point and left the Calf Islet on their lee, with Cronte-nay-Ivey-Lhaa towering into the gloomy sky. When they sailed through Fleshwick Bay the night gradually darkened, and they saw nothing of Ennyn Mooar. But the heavens lightened again and glittered with stars, and when they brought the lugger head to the wind in six fathoms of water outside Port Erin, the moon had risen behind Brada, and the steep and rugged headland showed clear against the sky.

"Have you found the herring on this ground at the same time in former seasons?" asked Christian of Kisseck.

"Not for seven years."

"Then why try now?"

"See the gull there. She's skipper to-night. She's showing us the fish."

And one after another the fleet brought to about them.

Danny Fayle had been leaning over the bow, and occasionally rapping with a stick at the timbers near the water.

"Any signs?" shouted Kisseck.

"Ay," said Danny, "the mar-fire's risin'."

The wind had dropped, and luminous patches of phosphorescent light in the water were showing Danny that the herring were stirring.

"Let's make a shot; up with the gear," said Kisseck; and preparations were made for shooting the nets over the quarter.

"Davy Cain (the mate), you see to the lint. Tommy Tear, look after the corks. Danny – where's that lad? – look to the seizings; d'ye hear?"

Then the nets were hauled from below and passed over a bank board placed between the hatchway and the top of the bulwark. Davy and Tommy shot the gear, and as the seizings came up, Danny ran aft and made them fast to the warp near the taffrail.

When the nets were all paid out, every net in the drift being tied to the next, and a solid wall of meshes nine feet deep had been swept away for half a mile behind them, Kisseck shouted, "Down with the sheets."

The sails were taken in, the mainmast – made to lower backward – was dropped, and only the drift-mizzen was left to keep the boat's head to the wind.

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