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AND
OTHER STORIES

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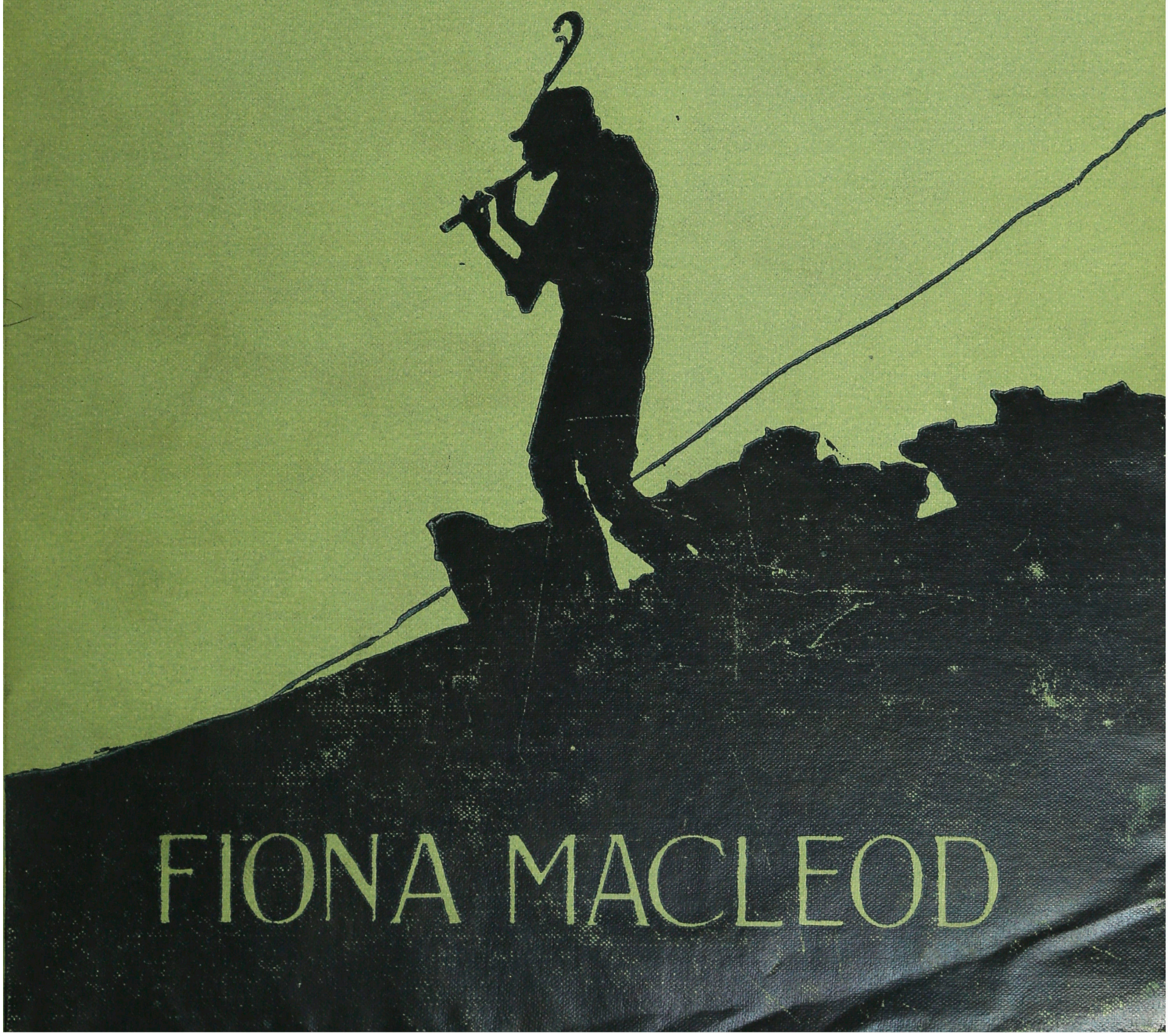

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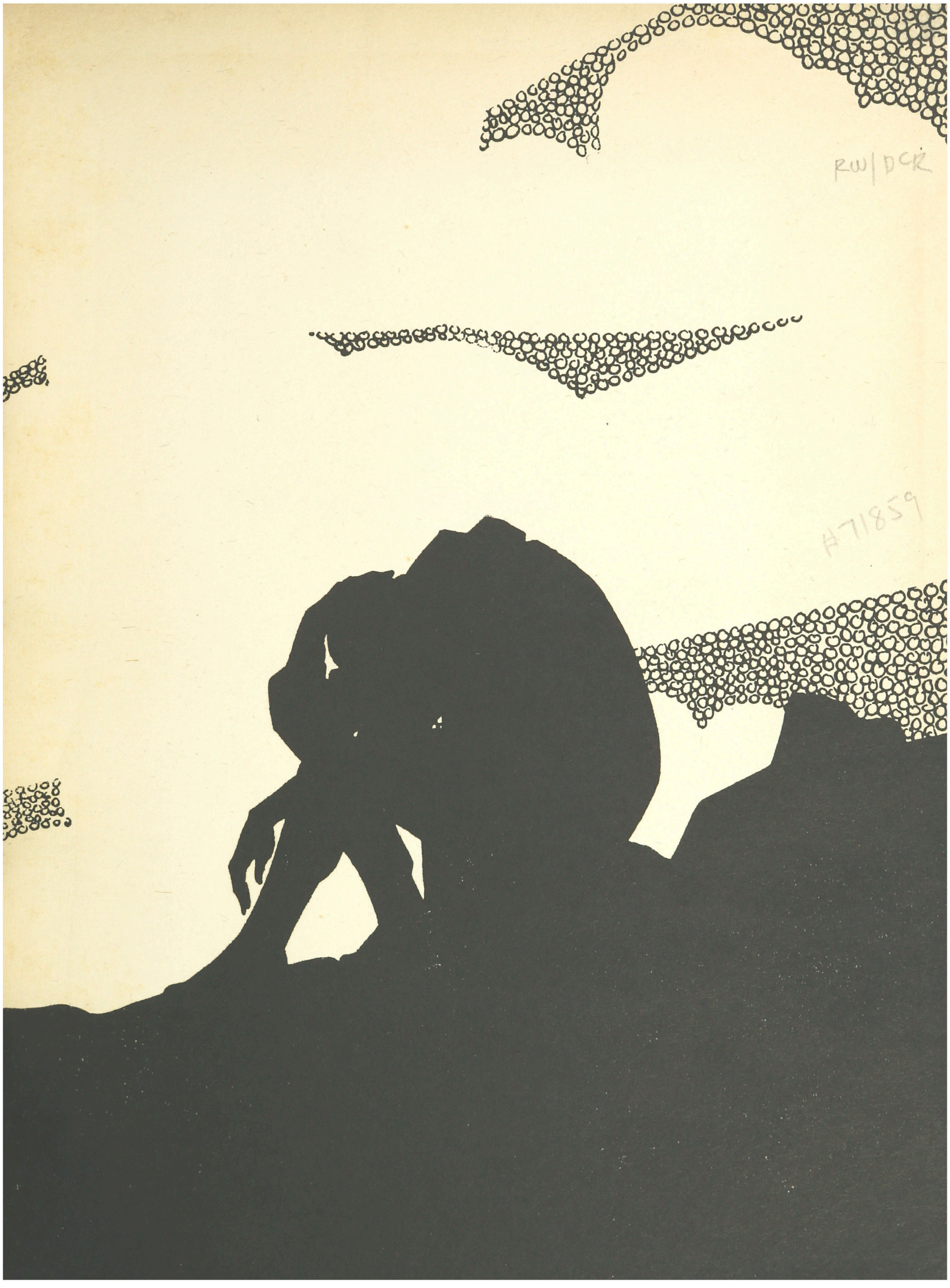

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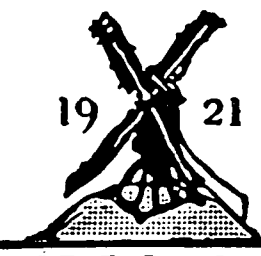

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THE HILLS OF RUEL

ONE night Eilidh and Isla and I were sitting before a fire of pine logs blazing upon peats, and listening to the snow as it whispered against the walls of the house. The wind crying in the glen, and the tumult of the hill-stream in spate, were behind the white confused rumour of the snow.

Eilidh was singing low to herself, and Isla was watching her. I could not look long at him, because of the welling upward of the tears that were in my heart. I know not why they were there.

At last, after a pause wherein each sat intent listening to the disarray without, Eilidh's sweet, thrilling voice slid through the silence :

> "Over the hills and far away,"
> That is the tune I heard one day.
> Oh, that I too might hear the cruel
> Honey-sweet folk of the Hills of Ruel.

I saw a shadow go into Isla's eyes. So I stirred and spoke to my cousin.

"You, Isla, who were born on the Hills of Ruel, should sure have seen something of the honey-sweet folk, as they are called in Eilidh's song."

He did not answer straightway, and I saw Eilidh furtively glance at him.

"I will tell you a story," he said at last, simply.

Long, long ago there was a beautiful woman, and her name was Etain, and she was loved by a man. I am not for remembering the name of that man, for it is a story of the far-off days: but he was a prince. I will call him Art, and mayhap he was a son of that Art the Solitary who was wont to hear the songs of the hidden people and to see the moonshine dancers.

This Art loved Etain, and she him. So one day he took her to his dûn, and she was his wife. But, and this was an ill thing for one like Art, who was a poet and a dreamer, he loved this woman overmuch. She held his life in the hollow of her hand. Nevertheless she loved him truly, after her kind: and for him, blind with the dream against his eyes, all might have been well, but for one thing. For Art, who was no coward, feared one hazard, and that was death: not his own death, and not even the death of Etain, but death. He loved Etain beyond the narrow frontiers of life: and at that indrawing shadow he stood appalled.

One day, when his longing was great upon him, he went out alone upon the Hills of Ruel. There a man met him, a stranger, comely beyond all men he had seen, with dark eyes of dream, and a shadowy smile.

THE HILLS OF RUEL

M.H. LAWRENCE

"And so," he said, "and so, Art the Dreamer, thou art eager to know what way thou mayest meet Etain, in that hour when the shadow of the Shadow is upon thee?"

"Even so; though I know neither thee nor the way by which my name is known unto thee."

"Oh, for sure I am only a wandering singer. But, now that we are met, I will sing to you, Art my lord."

Art looked at him frowningly. This man who called him lord spake with heedless sovereignty.

Then, of a sudden, song eddied off the lips of the man, the air of it marvellous light and of a haunting strangeness: and the words were those that Eilidh there sang by the fire.

Through the dusk of silence which that song made in his brain, Art saw the stranger draw from the fawnskin, slung round his shoulders and held by a gold torque, a reed. The man played upon it.

While he played, there was a stirring on the Hills of Ruel. All the green folk were there. They sang.

Art listened to their honey-sweet song, and grew drowsy with the joy and peace of it. And one there was who sang of deathless life; and Art, murmuring the name of Etain, fell asleep.

He was an old, old man when he awoke, and the grey hair that lay down the side of his face was damp with unremembered tears. But, not knowing this, he rose and cried "Etain, Etain!"

When he reached his dûn there was no Etain there. He sat down by old ashes, where the wind blew through a chink, and pondered. An old man entered at dusk.

"Where is Etain?" Art asked.

"Etain, the wife of Midir?"

"No; Etain, the wife of Art."

The old man mumbled through his open jaws:

"All these years since I was young, Etain the wife of Art has been Etain the wife of Midir."

"And who is Midir?"

"Midir is the King of the World; he, they say, who makes sand of women's hearts and dust of men's hope."

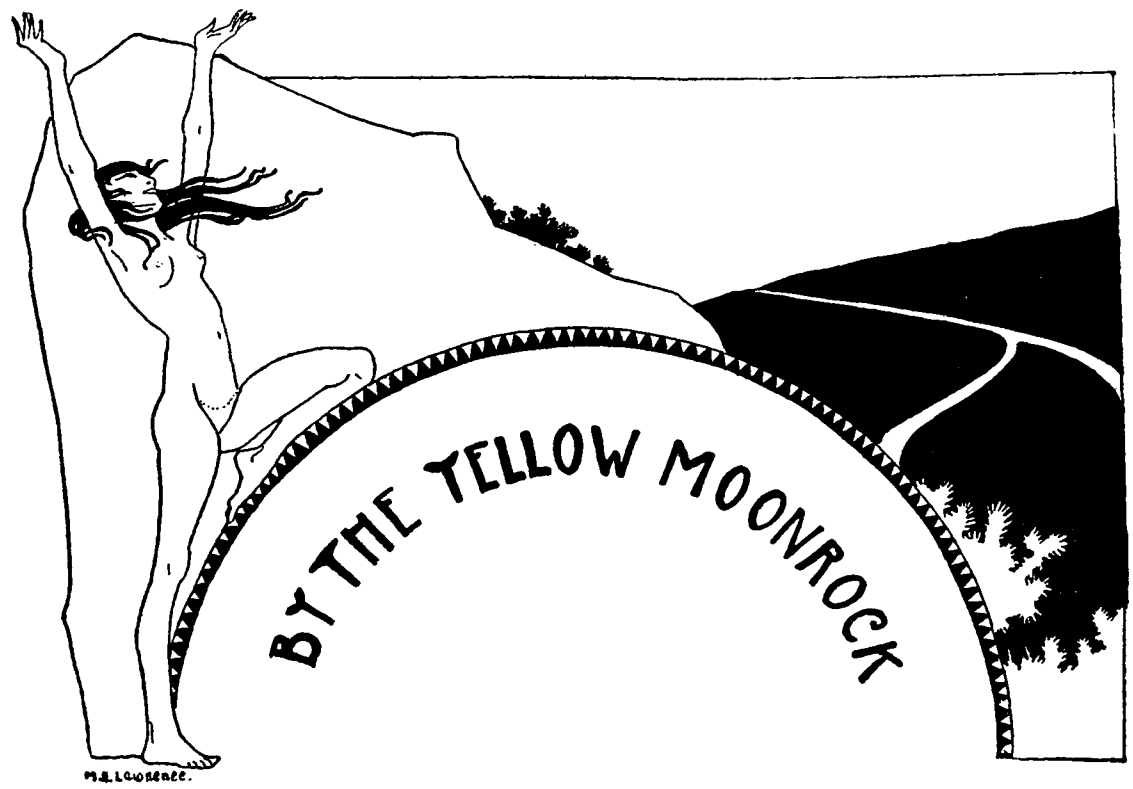
"And I have dreamed but an idle dream?" Art cried, with his heart breaking in a sob within him.

"Ay, for if Art you be, you have been dreaming a long dream upon the Hills of Ruel."

But when Art, old now and weak, turned to go back to the honey-sweet folk upon the Hills of Ruel, so that he might dream his dream again, he heard Midir laughing, and he died.

"And that is all," ended Isla abruptly, looking neither at Eilidh nor at me, and staring into the flame of the peats.

But Eilidh smiled no more to herself that night, and no more sang below her breath.



RORY MACALPINE the piper had come down the Strath on St. Bride's Eve, for the great wedding at the farm of his kinsman Donald Macalister. Every man and woman, every boy and girl, who could by hook or by crook get to the big dance at the barns was to be seen there: but no one that danced till he or she could dance no more had a wearier joy than Rory with the pipes. Reels and strathspeys that every one knew gave way at last to wilder strathspeys that no one had ever heard before . . . and why should they, since it was the hill-wind and the mountain-torrent and the roar of pines that had got loose in Rory's mind, and he not knowing it any more than a leaf that sails on the yellow wind?

He played with magic and pleasure, and had never looked handsomer, in his new grandeur of clothes, and

with his ruddy hair aflame in the torchlight, and his big blue eyes shining as with a lifting, shifting fire. But those who knew him best saw that he was strangely subdued for Rory MacAlpine, or at least, that he laughed and shouted (in the rare intervals when he was not playing, and there were two other pipers present to help the Master) more by custom than from the heart.

"What is't, Rory?" said Dalibrog to him, after a heavy reel wherein he had nearly killed a man by swinging upon and nigh flattening him against the wall.

"Nothing, foster-brother dear; it's just nothing at all. Fling away, Dalibrog; you're doing fine."

Later old Dionaid took him aside to bid him refresh himself from a brew of rum and lemons she had made, with spice and a flavour of old brandy—"Barra Punch" she called it—and then asked him if he had any sorrow at the back of his heart.

"Just this," he said in a whisper, "that Rory MacAlpine's fëy."

"Fëy, my lad, an' for why that? For sure, I'm thinking it's fëy with the good drink you have had all day, an' now here am I spoiling ye with more."

"Hush, woman; I'm not speaking of what comes wi' a drop to the bad. But I had a dream, I had; a powerful strange dream, for sure. I had it a month ago; I had it the night before I left Strathanndra; and I had it this very day of the days, as I lay sleepin' off the kindness I had since I came into Strathraonull."

"An' what will that dream be, now?"

"Sure, it's a strange dream, Dionaid Macalister. You know the great yellow stone that rises out of the heather

on the big moor of Dalmonadh, a mile or more beyond Tom-na-shee?"

"Ay, the Moonrock they call it: it that fell out o' the skies, they say."

"The Yellow Moonrock. Ay, the Yellow Moonrock; that's its name, for sure. Well, the first time I dreamed of it I saw it standing fair yellow in the moonshine. There was a moorfowl sitting on it, and it flew away. When it flew away I saw it was a ptarmigan, but she was as clean brown as though it were summer and not midwinter, and I thought that strange."

"How did you know it was a ptarmigan? It might have been a moorhen or a——"

"Hoots, woman, how do I know when it's wet or fine, when it's day or night? Well, as I was saying, I thought it strange; but I hadn't turned over that thought on its back before it was gone like the shadow o' a peewit, and I saw standing before me the beautifullest woman I ever saw in all my life. I've had sweethearts here and sweethearts there, Dionaid-nic-Tormod, and long ago I loved a lass who died, Sine MacNeil; but not one o' these, not sweet Sine herself, was like the woman I saw in my dream, who had more beauty upon her than them altogether, or than all the women in Strathraonull and Strathanndra."

"Have some more Barra punch, Rory," said Miss Macalister drily.

"Whist, ye old fule, begging your pardon for that same. She was as white as new milk, an' her eyes were as dark as the two black pools below Annora Linn, an' her hair was as long an' wavy as the shadows o' a willow in the wind; an' she sat an' she sang, an' if I could be remembering

that song now it's my fortune I'd be making, an' that quick too."

"And where was she?"

"Why, on the Moonrock, for sure. An' if I hadn't been a good Christian I'd have bowed down before her, because o'—because—well, because o' that big stare out of her eyes she had, an' the beauty of her, an' all. An' what's more, by the Black Stone of Iona, if I hadn't been a God-fearin' man I'd have run to her, an' put my arms round her, an' kissed the honey lips of her till she cried out, 'For the Lord's sake, Rory MacAlpine, leave off!'"

"It's well seen you were only in a dream, Rory MacAlpine."

At another time Rory would have smiled at that, but now he just stared.

"She said no word," he added, "but lifted a bit of hollow wood or thick reed. An' then all at once she whispered, 'I'm bonnie St. Bride of the Mantle,' an' wi' that she began to play, an' it was the finest, sweet, gentle, little music in the world. But a big fear was on me, an' I just turned an' ran."

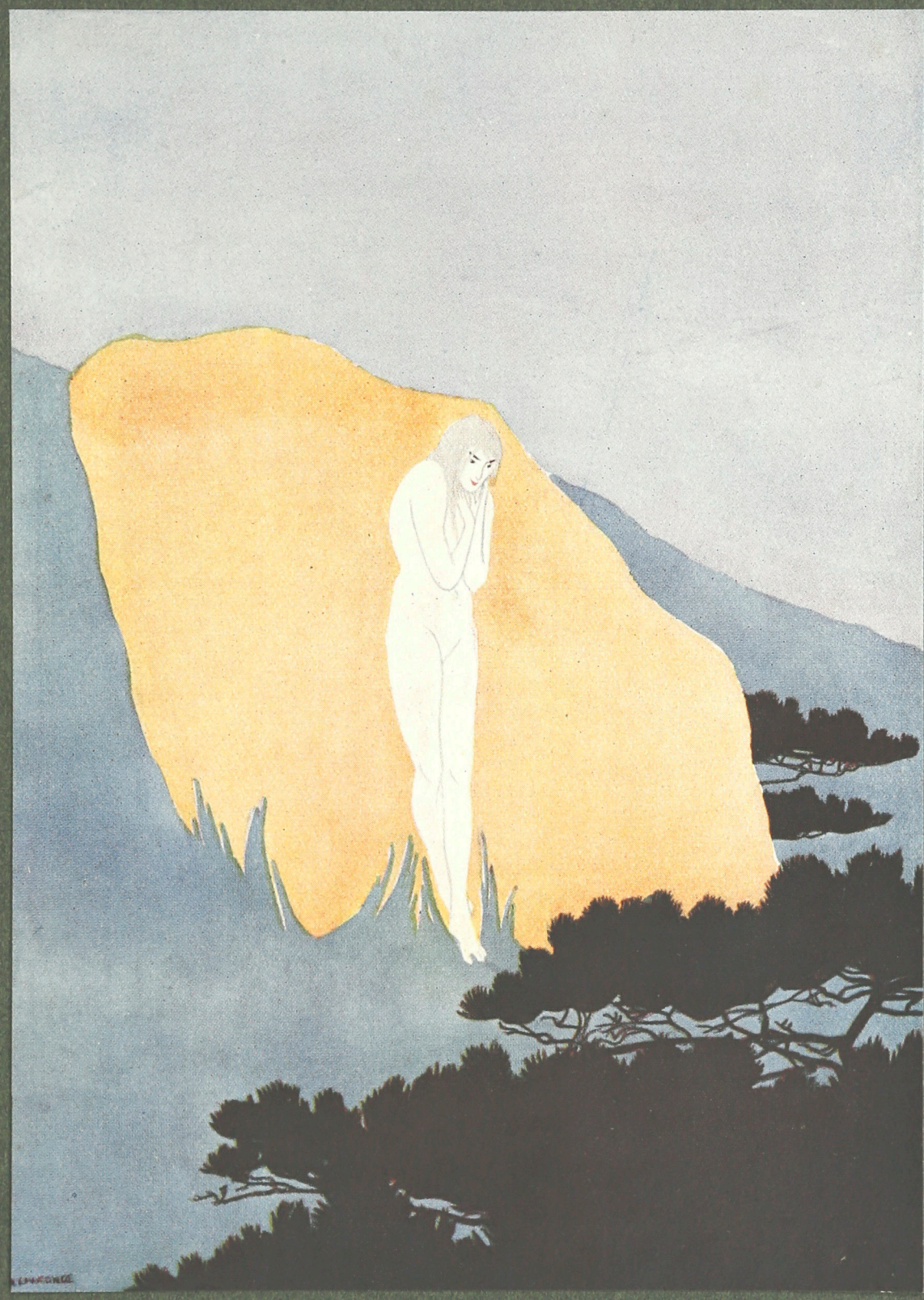
"No man'll ever call ye a fool again to my face, Rory MacAlpine. I never had the thought you had so much sense."

"She didna let me run so easy, for a grey bitch went yapping and yowling at my heels; an' just as I tripped an' felt the bad hot breath of the beast at my throat, I woke, an' was wet wi' sweat."

"An' you've had that dream three times?"

"I've had it three times, and this very day, to the Stones be it said. Now, you're a wise woman, Dionaid

BY THE YELLOW MOONROCK



Macalister, but can you tell me what that dream means?"

"If you're really fëy, I'm thinking I can, Rory MacAlpine."

"It's a true thing: Himself knows it."

"And what are you fëy of?"

"I'm fëy with the beauty o' that woman."

"There's good women wi' the fair looks on them in plenty, Rory; an' if you prefer them bad, you needna wear out new shoon before you'll find them."

"I'm fëy wi' the beauty o' that woman. I'm fëy wi' the beauty o' that woman that had the name o' Bride to her."

Dionaid Macalister looked at him with troubled eyes.

"When she took up the reed, did you see anything that frighted you?"

"Ay. I had a bit fright when I saw a big black adder slip about the Moonrock as the ptarmigan flew off; an' I had the other half o' that fright when I thought the woman lifted the adder, but it was only wood or a reed, for amn't I for telling you about the gentle, sweet music I heard?"

Old Dionaid hesitated; then, looking about her to see that no one was listening, she spoke in a whisper:

"An' you've been fëy since that hour because o' the beauty o' that woman?"

"Because o' the sore beauty o' that woman."

"An' it's not the drink?"

"No, no, Dionaid Macalister. You women are always for hurting the feelin's o' the drink. It is not the innycent drink, I am telling you; for sure, no; no, no, it is not the drink."

"Then I'll tell you what it means, Rory MacAlpine. It wasn't Holy St. Bride——"

"I know that, ye old—, I mean, Miss Macalister."

"It was the face of the *Bhean-Nimhir* you saw, the face of *Nighean-Imhir*, an' this is St. Bride's Night, an' it is on this night of the nights she can be seen, an' beware o' that seeing, Rory MacAlpine."

"The *Bhean-Nimhir*, the *Nighean-Imhir* . . . the Serpent Woman, the Daughter of Ivor—" muttered Rory; "where now have I heard tell o' the Daughter of Ivor?" Then he remembered an old tale of the isles, and his heart sank, because the tale was of a woman of the underworld who could suck the soul out of a man through his lips, and send it to slavery among the people of ill-will, whom there is no call to speak of by name; and if she had any spite, or any hidden wish that is not for our knowing, she could put the littleness of a fly's bite on the hollow of his throat, and take his life out of his body, and nip it and sting it till it was no longer a life, and till that went away on the wind that she chased with screams and laughter.

"Some say she's the wife of the Amadan-Dhu, the Dark Fool," murmured Dionaid, crossing herself furtively, for even at Dalibrog it was all Protestantry now.

But Rory was not listening. He sat intent, for he heard music—a strange music.

Dionaid shook him by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Rory, man; you'll be having sleep on you in another minute."

Just then a loud calling for the piper was heard, and Rory went back to the dancers. Soon his pipes were heard, and the reels swung to that good glad music, and

his face lighted up as he strode to and fro, or stopped and tap-tapped away with his right foot, while drone and chanter all but burst with the throng of sound in them.

But suddenly he began to play a reel that nigh maddened him, and his own face was wrought so that Dalibrog came up and signed to stop, and then asked him what in the name o' Black Donald he was playing.

Rory laughed foolishly.

"Oh, for sure, it's just a new reel o' my own. I call it 'The Reel of Ivor's Daughter.' An' a good reel it is too, although it's Rory MacAlpine says it."

"Who is she, an' what Ivor will you be speaking of?"

"Oh, ask the Amadan-Dhu; it's he will be knowing that. No, no, now, I will not be naming it that name; sure, I will call it instead the Serpent-Reel."

"Come now, Rory, you've played enough, an' if your wrist's not tired wi' the chanter, sure, it must be wi' lifting the drink to your lips. An' it's time, too, these lads an' lasses were off."

"No, no, they're waiting to bring in the greying of the day—St. Bride's Day. They'll be singing the hymn for that greying, 'Bride bhoidheach muime Chriosda.'"

"Not they, if Dalibrog has a say in it! Come, now, have a drink with me, your own foster-brother, an' then lie down an' sleep it off, an' God's blessing be on you."

Whether it was Dalibrog's urgency, or the thought of the good drink he would have, and he with a terrible thirst on him after that lung-bursting reel of his, Rory went quietly away with the host, and was on a mattress on the floor of a big, empty room, and snoring hard, long before

 the other pipers had ceased piping, or the last dancers flung their panting breaths against the frosty night.

An hour after midnight Rory woke with a start. He had "a spate of a headache on," he muttered, as he half rose and struck a match against the floor. When he saw that he was still in his brave gear, and had lain down "just as he was," and also remembered all that had happened and the place he was in, he wondered what had waked him.

Now that he thought of it, he had heard music: yes, for sure, music—for all that it was so late, and after every one had gone home. What was it? It was not any song of his own, nor any air he had. He must have dreamed that it came across great lonely moors, and had a laugh and a moan and a sudden cry in it.

He was cold. The window was open. That was a stupid, careless thing of Donald Macalister to do, and he sober, as he always was, though he could drink deep; on a night of frost like this Death could slip in on the back of a shadow and get his whisper in your ear before you could rise for the stranger.

He stumbled to his feet and closed the window. Then he laid down again, and was nearly asleep, and was confused between an old prayer that rose in his mind like a sunken spar above a wave; and whether to take Widow Sheen a packet of great thick Sabbath peppermints, or a good heavy twist of tobacco; and a strange delightsome memory of Dionaid Macalister's brew of rum and lemons with a touch of old brandy in it; when again he heard that little, wailing, fantastic air, and sat up with the sweat on his brow.

The sweat was not there only because of the little thin music he heard, and it the same, too, as he had heard before; but because the window was wide open again, though the room was so heavy with silence that the pulse of his heart made a noise like a jumping rat.

Rory sat, as still as though he were dead, staring at the window. He could not make out whether the music was faint because it was so far away, or because it was played feebly, like a child's playing, just under the sill.

He was a big, strong man, but he leaned and wavered like the flame of a guttering candle in that slow journey of his from the mattress to the window. He could hear the playing now quite well. It was like the beautiful, sweet song of "Bride bhoidheach muime Chriosda," but with the holy peace out of it, and with a little, evil, hidden laugh flapping like a wing against the blessed name of Christ's foster-mother. But when it sounded under the window, it suddenly was far ; and when it was far, the last circling peewit-lilt would be at his ear like a skiffing bat.

When he looked out, and felt the cold night lie on his skin, he could not see because he saw too well. He saw the shores of the sky filled with dancing lights, and the great lighthouse of the moon sending a foam-white stream across the delicate hazes of frost which were too thin to be seen, and only took the sharp edges off the stars, or sometimes splintered them into sudden dazzle. He was like a man in a sailless, rudderless boat, looking at the skies because he lay face upward and dared not stoop and look into the dark, slipping water alongside.

He saw, too, the hornlike curve of Tom-na-shee black against the blueness, and the inky line of Dalmonadh Moor

beyond the plumy mass of Dalibrog woods, and the near meadows where a leveret jumped squealing, and then the bare garden with ragged gooseberry-bushes like scraggy, hunched sheep, and at last the white gravel-walk bordered with the withered roots of pinks and southernwood.

Then he looked from all these great things and these little things to the ground beneath the window. There was nothing there. There was no sound. Not even far away could he hear any faint, devilish music. At least——

Rory shut the window, and went back to his mattress and lay down.

"By the sun an' wind," he exclaimed, "a man gets fear on him nowadays, like a cold in the head when a thaw comes."

Then he lay and whistled a blithe catch. For sure, he thought, he would rise at dawn and drown that thirst of his in whatever came first to hand.

Suddenly he stopped whistling, and on the uplift of a lilting turn. In a moment the room was full of old silence again.

Rory turned his head slowly. The window was wide open.

A sob died in his throat. He put his hands to his dry mouth ; the back of it was wet with the sweat on his face.

White and shaking, he rose and walked steadily to the window. He looked out and down : there was no one, nothing.

He pulled the ragged cane chair to the sill, and sat there, silent and hopeless.

Soon big tears fell one by one, slowly, down his face. He understood now. His heart filled with sad, bitter grief and brimmed over, and that was why the tears fell.

It was his hour that had come and opened the window.

He was cold, and as faint with hunger and heavy with thirst as though he had not put a glass to his lips or a bit to his mouth for days instead of for hours ; but for all that, he did not feel ill, and he wondered and wondered why he was to die so soon, and he so well-made and handsome, and unmarried too, and now with girls as eager to have him as trouts for a May fly.

And after a time Rory began to dream of that great beauty that had troubled his dreams ; and while he thought of it, and the beautiful, sweet wonder of the woman who had it, she whom he had seen sitting in the moonshine on the yellow rock, he heard again the laughing, crying, fall and lilt of that near and far song. But now it troubled him no more.

He stooped, and swung himself out of the window, and at the noise of his feet on the gravel a dog barked. He saw a white hound running swiftly across the pasture beyond him. It was gone in a moment, so swiftly did it run. He heard a second bark, and knew that it came from the old deerhound in the kennel. He wondered where that white hound he had seen came from, and where it was going, and it silent and white and swift as a moonbeam, with head low and in full sleuth.

He put his hand on the sill, and climbed into the room again; lifted the pipes which he or Donald Macalister had thrown down beside the mattress ; and again, but stealthily, slipped out of the window.

Rory walked to the deerhound and spoke to it. The dog whimpered, but barked no more. When the piper walked on, and had gone about a score yards, the old hound

threw back his head and gave howl upon howl, long and mournful. The cry went from stead to stead; miles and miles away the farm-dogs answered.

Perhaps it was to drown their noise that Rory began to finger his pipes, and at last let a long drone go out like a great humming cockchafer on the blue frosty stillness of the night. The crofters at Moor Edge heard his pibroch as he walked swiftly along the road that leads to Dalmonadh Moor. Some thought it was uncanny; some that one of the pipers had lost his way, or made an early start; one or two wondered if Rory MacAlpine were already on the move, like a hare that could not be long in one form.

The last house was the gamekeeper's, at Dalmonadh Toll, as it was still called. Duncan Grant related next day that he was wakened by the skreigh of the pipes, and knew them for Rory MacAlpine's by the noble, masterly fashion in which drone and chanter gave out their music, and also because that music was the strong, wild, fearsome reel that Rory had played last in the byres, that which he had called "The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor."

"At that," he added, each time he told the tale, "I rose and opened the window, and called to MacAlpine. 'Rory,' I cried, 'is that you?'

"'Ay,' he said, stopping short, an' giving the pipes a lilt. 'Ay, it's me an' no other, Duncan Grant.'

"'I thought ye would be sleeping sound at Dalibrog?'

"But Rory made no answer to that, and walked on. I called to him in the English: 'Dinna go out on the moor, Rory! Come in, man, an' have a sup o' hot porridge an' a mouthful with them.' But he never turned his head; an' as it was cold an' dark, I said to myself that doited fools

must gang their ain gait, an' so turned an' went to my bed again, though I hadn't a wink so long as I could hear Rory playing."

But Duncan Grant was not the last man who heard "The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor."

A mile or more across Dalmonadh Moor the heather-set road forks. One way is a cart-way to Balnaree; the other is the drover's way to Tom-na-shee and the hill countries beyond. It is up this, a mile from the fork, that the Yellow Moonrock rises like a great fang out of purple lips. Some say it is of granite, and some marble, and that it is an old cromlech of the forgotten days; others that it is an unknown substance, a meteoric stone believed to have fallen from the moon.

Not near the Moonrock itself, but five score yards or more away, and perhaps more ancient still, there is a group of three lesser fang-shaped boulders of trap, one with illegible runic writing or signs. These are familiar to some as the Stannin' Stanes; to others, who have the Gaelic, as the Stone Men, or simply as the Stones, or the Stones of Dalmonadh. None knows anything certain of this ancient cromlech, though it is held by scholars to be of Pictish times.

Here a man known as Peter Lamont, though commonly as Peter the Tinker, an idle, homeless vagrant, had taken shelter from the hill-wind which had blown earlier in the night, and had heaped a bed of dry bracken. He was asleep when he heard the wail and hum of the pipes.

He sat up in the shadow of one of the Stones. By the stars he saw that it was still the black of the night, and that dawn would not be astir for three hours or more. Who could be playing the pipes in that lonely place at that hour?

The man was superstitious, and his fears were heightened by his ignorance of what the unseen piper played (and Peter the Tinker prided himself on his knowledge of pipe music) and by the strangeness of it. He remembered, too, where he was. There was not one in a hundred who would lie by night among the Stannin' Stanes, and he had himself been driven to it only by heavy weariness and fear of death from the unsheltered cold. But not even that would have made him lie near the Moonrock. He shivered as memories of wild stories rose ghastly one after the other.

The music came nearer. The tinker crawled forward, and hid behind the Stone next the path, and cautiously, under a tuft of bracken, stared in the direction whence the sound came.

He saw a tall man striding along in full Highland gear, with his face death-white in the moonshine, and his eyes glazed like those of a leistered salmon. It was not till the piper was close that Lamont recognised him as Rory MacAlpine.

He would have spoken—and gladly, in that lonely place, to say nothing of the curiosity that was on him—had it not been for those glazed eyes and that set, death-white face. The man was fëy. He could see that. It was all he could do not to keep away like a rabbit.

Rory MacAlpine passed him, and played till he was close on the Moonrock. Then he stopped, and listened, leaning forward as though straining his eyes to see into the shadow.

He heard nothing, saw nothing, apparently. Slowly he waved a hand across the heather.

Then suddenly the piper began a rapid talking. Peter

the Tinker could not hear what he said, perhaps because his own teeth chattered with the fear that was on him. Once or twice Rory stretched his arms, as though he were asking something, as though he were pleading.

Suddenly he took a step or two forward, and in a loud, shrill voice cried :

" By Holy St. Bride, let there be peace between us, white woman !

" I do not fear you, white woman, because I too am of the race of Ivor :

" My father's father was the son of Ivor mhic Alpein, the son of Ivor the Dark, the son of Ivor Honeymouth, the son of Ruaridh, the son of Ruaridh the Red, of the straight, unbroken line of Ivor the King :

" I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm, white woman :

" This is the Day of Bride, the day for the daughter of Ivor. It is Rory MacAlpine who is here, of the race of Ivor. I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm :

" Sure, now, it was you who sang. It was you who sang. It was you who played. It was you who opened my window :

" It was you who came to me in a dream, daughter of Ivor. It was you who put your beauty upon me. Sure, it is that beauty that is my death, and I am hungering and thirsting for it."

Having cried thus, Rory stood, listening, like a crow on a furrow when it sees the wind coming.

The tinker, trembling, crept a little nearer. There was nothing, no one.

Suddenly Rory began singing in a loud, chanting, monotonous voice:

"An diugh La' Bride,
Thig nighean Imhir as a chnoc,
Cha bhean mise do nighean Imhir,
'S cha bhean Imhir dhomh.'

(To-day, the day of Bride,
The daughter of Ivor shall come from the knoll;
I will not touch the daughter of Ivor,
Nor shall the daughter of Ivor touch me.)

Then, bowing low, with fantastic gestures, and with the sweep of his plaid making a shadow like a flying cloud, he sang again:

"La' Bride nam brig ban
Thig an rigen ran a tom
Cha bhoin mise ris an rigen ran,
'S cha bhoin an rigen ran ruim."

(On the day of Bride of the fair locks,
The noble queen will come from the hill;
I will not molest the noble queen,
Nor will the noble queen molest me.)

"An' I, too, Nighean Imhir," he cried in a voice more loud, more shrill, more plaintive yet, "will be doing now what our own great forbear did, when he made *tabhartas agus tuis* to you, so that neither he nor his seed for ever should die of you; an' I, too, Ruaridh MacDhonuill mhic Alpein, will make offering and incense." And with that Rory stepped back, and lifted the pipes, and flung them at the base of the Yellow Moonrock, where they caught on a jagged spar and burst with a great wailing screech that made the hair rise on the head of Peter the Tinker, where he crouched sick with the white fear.

"That for my *tabhartas*," Rory cried again, as though

he were calling to a multitude ; "an' as I've no *tuis*, an' the only incense I have is the smoke out of my pipe, take the pipe an' the tobacco too, an' it's all the smoke I have or am ever like to have now, an' as good incense too as any other, daughter of Ivor."

Suddenly Peter Lamont heard a thin, strange, curling, twisting bit of music, so sweet for all its wildness that cold and hunger went below his heart. It grew louder, and he shook with fear. But when he looked at Rory MacAlpine, and saw him springing to and fro in a dreadful reel, and snapping his fingers and flinging his arms up and down like flails, he could stand no more, but with a screech rose and turned across the heather, and fluttered and fell and fell and fluttered like a wounded snipe.

He lay still once, after a bad fall, for his breath was like a thistledown blown this way and that above his head. It was on a heathery knoll, and he could see the Moonrock yellow-white in the moonshine. The savage lilt of that jigging wild air still rang in his ears, with never a sweetness in it now, though when he listened it grew fair and lightsome, and put a spell of joy and longing in him. But he could see nothing of Rory.

He stumbled to his knees and stared. There was something on the road.

He heard a noise as of men struggling. But all he saw was Rory MacAlpine swaying and swinging, now up and now down ; and then at last the piper was on his back in the road and tossing like a man in a fit, and screeching with a dreadful voice, "Let me go ! let me go ! Take your lips off my mouth ! take your lips off my mouth !"

Then, abruptly, there was no sound, but only a dreadful

silence ; till he heard a rush of feet, and heard the heather-sprigs break and crack, and something went past him like a flash of light.

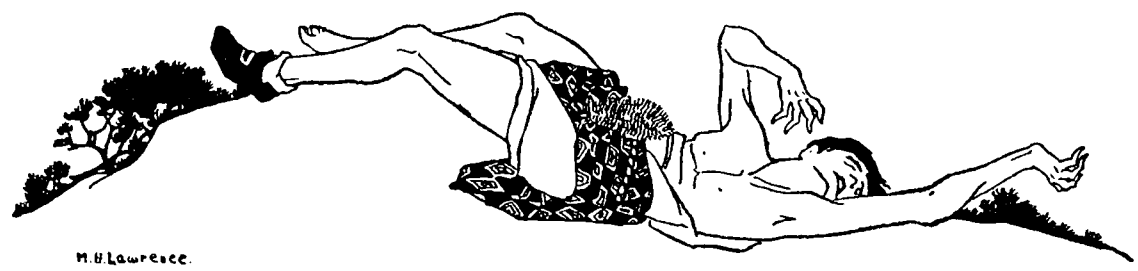
With a scream he flung himself down the heather knoll, and ran like a driven hare till he came to the white road beyond the moor ; and just as dawn was breaking, he fell in a heap at the byre-edge at Dalmonadh Toll, and there Duncan Grant found him an hour later, white and senseless still.

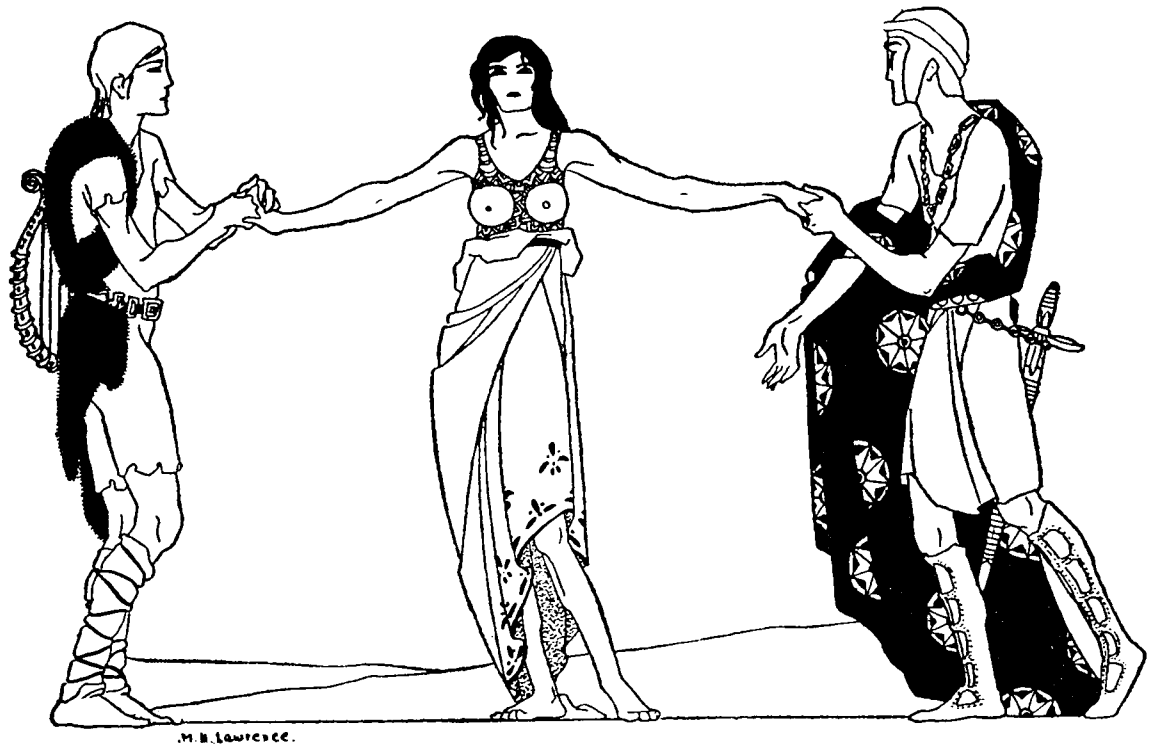
Neither Duncan Grant nor any one else believed Peter Lamont's tale, but at noon the tinker led a reluctant few to the Yellow Moonrock.

The broken pipes still hung on the jagged spar at the base. Half on the path and half on the heather was the body of Rory MacAlpine. He was all but naked to the waist, and his plaid and jacket were as torn and ragged as Lamont's own, and the bits were scattered far and wide. His lips were blue and swelled. In the hollow of his hairy, twisted throat was a single drop of black blood.

" It's an adder's bite," said Duncan Grant.

None spoke.





ENYA OF THE DARK EYES

ON the day when Firbis of the Seven Dûns, called Firbis the White, from the long white hair which fell upon his shoulders, and also because of his pale face, pale as a leper's, with scarlet lips, told Cathba, the son of Cathba Mòr, that he might have his daughter to wife, Enya of the Dark Eyes was not to be found.

At first Firbis laughed. Then, when he saw Cathba frowning and muttering, he waxed wroth, and bade a search be made for the girl.

It was Culain of the Trails who found her. She was in the depth of the great forest beyond Dûn-Fhirbis, and was with Aodh[1] the Singer. No man in that region knew

[1] *Aodh* is pronounced as the letter *Y*.

who Aodh was, save that he was a hillman out of the north. This was because he was under *geas* to wear a fawnskin covering over his face, with slits in it for his eyes and mouth and nostrils: nor might he break that vow. His songs were the sweetest that man or woman had heard: there were none in Alba sweeter. And when he played they called him the Green Harper, for a spell was upon them in that playing. He had no name among them but "The Harper." Once Cathba taunted him, and said openly he did not believe it was a true *geas*, and that the man was a spy. Amid the lifting of spears and the sudden tremulous movement of swords, as though a wind were there, Aodh stood unmoved. He took his harp and played; and in the silence thereafter he touched the strings again, and chanted an old ancestral song, passing sweet. When he ceased, every weapon slept.

But now Culain of the Trails saw the Harper, with the fawnskin mask away from his face and lying at his feet on the green moss.

On the branch of a fallen oak Enya of the Dark Eyes lay, idly swaying. Her eyes were filled with light while she watched Aodh.

"My lord and my king," she cried in a low voice, so thrilling sweet that Culain trembled, being only a youth and a dreamer of dreams. It was when Aodh had ceased singing a song to her.

Culain turned and sank among the bracken. But Aodh had heard. The arrow flew, whistling a thin song, and went in between the white shoulders of the youth, till it thrust its head into the oak-root underneath his breast.

ENYA OF THE DARK EYES

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Aodh came forward and looked at him.

"That arrow-flight is my grief," he said gravely, "for you are young and comely."

"It is Culain," whispered Enya, who had come swiftly to where the slain man lay; "it is Culain of the Trails."

"Yes," answered Culain, when he had spat the blood and foam from his mouth, but without turning his head, for that he could not do, being arrow-pinned: "yes, it is Culain, and it is my last trail."

"Let him be," Enya whispered, when she saw the Harper raise his spear; "let him be, O Aodh, my lord. He may yet live."

"It was to make the end less hard. But as you will, Enya." Then the two moved deeper into the wood.

Later, the runners found Culain. But he was dead. At sundown Firbis heard Enya singing in the grianân over the great Hall of the Horns. He called to her, and told her that on the morrow she was to be the wife of Cathba. Enya said no word; but at the rising of the moon she went to the forest-edge and gave three hoots of the white owl.

"Who will make a song for this marriage?" said Firbis, after the ale-feast in the morning. "Where is the Harper?"

But none had seen him. An old man said he had met him at moonrise, and that he was on a white stallion and riding against the stars of the north.

At noon, Cathba took Enya to wife. So great was her beauty, that men looked askance at him, and old men sat silent, heavy with fear.

"Sing to me," he said.

She sang. It was a song of love. He laughed when she set down the little gold-bossed clàrsach, and put back the hair from his eyes.

"Why do you laugh, Cathba Fleetfoot?"

"Because that you know not what you sang when you sang that song; yet, even as you sang, so shall it be."

Enya stooped and lifted the clàrsach again; and as she put back her head from that stooping, her eyes filled with fire. Suddenly she laughed.

"Why do you laugh, Enya of the Dark Eyes?"

"Because Aodh the Singer, Aodh the King, is here, and he comes for me, who am his wife."

Cathba sprang to his feet. But the wolf-thong was round him, and he was bound hand and foot before he could draw the long gold-hilted knife that he wore.

Aodh stooped and lifted him; then he threw him upon the deerskins where Enya had lain.

"The bride-bed for you, Cathba," said Aodh mockingly; "for me the bride."

Outside the noise of spears and swords, and lamentation of men and women, and fierce cries ceased. The hillmen were few, or they would have burned the dûn. But Firbis called for a truce, and bade Aodh take Enya of the Dark Eyes and go.

Thus was it that Aodh the Hill-King, Aodh the Singer, Aodh the Proud, won Enya whom he loved.

Yet he loved overmuch. It is not the way of kings, but Aodh was a poet, and he had the dream of dreams.

On the day when the Ardrigh of the Hill-Lands died, runners came to Aodh the Proud. He was to be Ardrigh. He sought Enya to tell her this thing; but she was in the

woods, or upon the hills. So he fared eastward without seeing her whom he loved.

It was in the dûn of the High King that he heard Cathba had laid waste his rath and carried captive away with him Enya of the Dark Eyes.

In a night and a day he was in his own lands again. At the call of Aodh the Proud the hill-clans gathered, and he came up with the warriors and prisoners of Cathba, where the mountains break. Then was fought the Battle of the Sloping Hill.

At the setting of the sun there were crowns lying there, idle gold in the yellow sand, and no man heeded them. And where the long grass waved there were women's breasts, so still in the brown silence, that the flittering moths, which shake with the breaths of daisies, motionlessly poised their wings above where so many sighs once were, and where no more was any pulse of joy.

The noise of spears was silent. The wild-hawk, and not the javelin, hissed in the stillness. Ravens flew where the arrows had fallen into bloody pools.

The man who had made this slaughter stood alone in that place. The warriors were in the dark glens, beyond the stream below the hill-slope, thrusting spears into pale fugitives, and laughing as they tied white women by their long hair to the boles of the pines.

This was the man called Aodh the Proud.

Aodh searched the dead. First, he looked at all those who lay fallen head forward or with upturned face. Then, disdainfully, he turned over the bodies of those speared, or slain by arrow or javelin, from behind.

He found nowhere the body of Cathba.

That night they brought him a captive woman. She was old, but bought her life with what she had to tell: for that telling was of Enya.

Cathba had not been in the Battle of the Hill-Slope. He was now in the nearest of the forest-dûns of Enya's father.

Firbis the White had ever hated Aodh, and the old man's laughter was now as loud and as long as the baying of his wolf-hound. When she had left, the woman said, Enya was lying on the deerskins, playing with the long hair of Cathba.

"She was singing a song," added the woman.

"What song did she sing?" asked Aodh.

"It was a song of meeting winds, meeting waves, of day and night, of life and death; and at the end of each singing she sang:

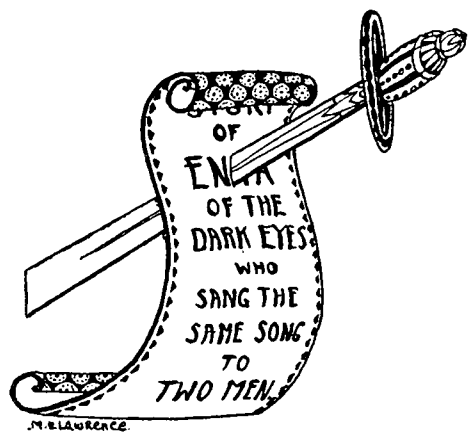
'I, Enya of the Dark Eyes, love but thee, and thee only, O dear one,
Man of my heart art thou, thee most do I love, thee only, O dear one!'"

Then Aodh the King knew what song Enya of the Dark Eyes had sung while she lay on the deerskins and played with the dark hair of Cathba, son of Cathba Mòr. It was a song he had heard when Enya of the Dark Eyes lay on the deerskins in the hill-dûn of him, Aodh the King, while she played with his long yellow hair.

Aodh the Proud turned and fared back alone through the field of the dead. But when the king came to his dûn, the women would not let him enter; for he was baying like a wolf, and shaking a bloody spear, and laughing wild, and calling to a star that was hanging low in the west, "*Enya, Enya, Enya! Enya, Enya, Enya!*"

And so he was king no longer. He was called the Laughing Man, for he could throw a spear no more, but often laughed idly, with a little foam ever upon his mouth. And at the last he ate roots, and went naked, and in the end was trampled to death by the wild swine.

That is the story of Aodh the Proud, who made deathless beauty out of the beauty and love of Enya of the Dark Eyes, who sang the same song to two men.



THE DÀN-NAN-RÒN

I

WHEN Anne Gillespie, that was my friend in Eilanmore, left the island after the death of her uncle, the old man Robert Achanna, it was to go far west.

Among the men of the Outer Isles who for three summers past had been at the fishing off Eilanmore there was one named Mànus MacCodrum. He was a fine lad to see, but though most of the fisherfolk of the Lews and North Uist are fair, either with reddish hair and grey eyes, or blue-eyed and yellow-haired, he was of a brown skin with dark hair and dusky brown eyes. He was, however, as unlike to the dark Celts of Arran and the Inner Hebrides

as to the Northmen. He came of his people, sure enough.
All the MacCodrums of North Uist had been brown-skinned and brown-haired and brown-eyed : and herein may have lain the reason why, in bygone days, this small clan of Uist was known throughout the Western Isles as the *Sliochd-nan-Ròn*, the offspring of the seals.

Not so tall as most of the men of North Uist and the Lews, Mànus MacCodrum was of a fair height, and supple and strong. No man was a better fisherman than he, and he was well liked of his fellows, for all the morose gloom that was upon him at times. He had a voice as sweet as a woman's when he sang, and he sang often, and knew all the old runes of the islands, from the Obb of Harris to the Head of Mingulay. Often, too, he chanted the beautiful *orain spioradail* of the Catholic priests and Christian Brothers of South Uist and Barra, though where he lived in North Uist he was the sole man who adhered to the ancient faith.

It may have been because Anne was a Catholic too, though, sure, the Achannas were so also, notwithstanding that their forbears and kindred in Galloway were Protestant (and this because of old Robert Achanna's love for his wife, who was of the old faith, so it is said)—it may have been for this reason, though I think her lover's admiring eyes and soft speech and sweet singing had more to do with it, that she pledged her troth to Mànus. It was a south wind for him as the saying is ; for with her rippling brown hair and soft, grey eyes and cream-white skin, there was no comelier lass in the isles.

So when Achanna was laid to his long rest, and there was none left upon Eilanmore save only his three youngest

sons, Mànus MacCodrum sailed north-eastward across the Minch to take home his bride. Of the four eldest sons, Alasdair had left Eilanmore some months before his father died, and sailed westward, though no one knew whither or for what end or for how long, and no word had been brought from him, nor was he ever seen again in the island which had come to be called Eilan-nan-Allmharachain, the Isle of the Strangers ; Allan and William had been drowned in a wild gale in the Minch ; and Robert had died of the white fever, that deadly wasting disease which is the scourge of the Isles. Marcus was now "Eilanmore," and lived there with Gloom and Seumas, all three unmarried, though it was rumoured among the neighbouring islanders that each loved Marsail nic Ailpean,[1] in Eilean-Rona of the Summer Isles hard by the coast of Sutherland.

When Mànus asked Anne to go with him she agreed. The three brothers were ill-pleased at this, for apart from their not wishing their cousin to go so far away, they did not want to lose her, as she not only cooked for them and did all that a woman does, including spinning and weaving, but was most sweet and fair to see, and in the long winter nights sang by the hour together, while Gloom played strange wild airs upon his *feadan*, a kind of oaten pipe or flute.

She loved Mànus, I know ; but there was this reason also for her going, that she was afraid of Gloom. Often upon the moor or on the hill she turned and hastened home, because she heard the lilt and fall of that feadan. It was an

[1] Marsail nic Ailpean is the Gaelic of which an English translation would be Marjory MacAlpine. *Nic* is a contraction for *nighean mhic*, "daughter of the line of."

eerie thing to her, to be going through the twilight when she thought the three men were in the house, smoking after their supper, and suddenly to hear beyond and coming towards her the shrill song of that oaten flute, playing "The Dance of the Dead," or "The Flow and Ebb," or "The Shadow-Reel."

That, sometimes at least, he knew she was there was clear to her, because, as she stole rapidly through the tangled fern and gale, she would hear a mocking laugh follow her like a leaping thing.

Mànus was not there on the night when she told Marcus and his brothers that she was going. He was in the haven on board the *Luath*, with his two mates, he singing in the moonshine as all three sat mending their fishing gear.

After the supper was done, the three brothers sat smoking and talking over an offer that had been made about some Shetland sheep. For a time Anne watched them in silence. They were not like brothers, she thought. Marcus, tall, broad-shouldered, with yellow hair and strangely dark blue-black eyes and black eyebrows; stern, with a weary look on his sun-brown face. The light from the peats glinted upon the tawny curve of thick hair that trailed from his upper lip, for he had the *caisean-feusag* of the Northmen. Gloom, slighter of build, dark of hue and hair, but with hairless face; with thin, white, long-fingered hands that had ever a nervous motion, as though they were tide-wrack. There was always a frown on the centre of his forehead, even when he smiled with his thin lips and dusky, unbetraying eyes. He looked what he was, the brain of the Achannas. Not only did he have the English as

though native to that tongue, but could and did read strange unnecessary books. Moreover, he was the only son of Robert Achanna to whom the old man had imparted his store of learning, for Achanna had been a schoolmaster in his youth, in Galloway, and he had intended Gloom for the priesthood. His voice, too, was low and clear, but cold as pale-green water running under ice. As for Seumas, he was more like Marcus than Gloom, though not so fair. He had the same brown hair and shadowy hazel eyes, the same pale and smooth face, with something of the same intent look which characterised the long-time missing, and probably dead, eldest brother, Alasdair. He, too, was tall and gaunt. On Seumas's face there was that indescribable, as to some of course imperceptible, look which is indicated by the phrase, "the dusk of the shadow," though few there are who know what they mean by that, or, knowing, are fain to say.

Suddenly, and without any word or reason for it, Gloom turned and spoke to her.

"Well, Anne, and what is it?"

"I did not speak, Gloom."

"True for you *mo cailinn*. But it's about to speak you were."

"Well, and that is true. Marcus, and you, Gloom, and you, Seumas, I have that to tell which you will not be altogether glad for the hearing. 'Tis about—about—me and—and Mànus."

There was no reply at first. The three brothers sat looking at her like the kye at a stranger on the moorland. There was a deepening of the frown on Gloom's brow, but when Anne looked at him his eyes fell and dwelt

THE TEMPTING OF ANNE

H. Lawrence.

in the shadow at his feet. Then Marcus spoke in a low voice :

" Is it Mànus MacCodrum you will be meaning ? "

" Ay, sure."

Again silence. Gloom did not lift his eyes, and Seumas was now staring at the peats. Marcus shifted uneasily.

" And what will Mànus MacCodrum be wanting ? "

" Sure, Marcus, you know well what I mean. Why do you make this thing hard for me ? There is but one thing he would come here wanting. And he has asked me if I will go with him ; and I have said yes ; and if you are not willing that he come again with the minister, or that we go across to the kirk in Berneray of Uist in the Sound of Harris, then I will not stay under this roof another night, but will go away from Eilanmore at sunrise in the *Luath*, that is now in the haven. And that is for the hearing and knowing, Marcus and Gloom and Seumas ! "

Once more silence followed her speaking. It was broken in a strange way. Gloom slipped his feadan into his hands, and so to his mouth. The clear, cold notes of the flute filled the flame-lit room. It was as though white polar birds were drifting before the coming of snow.

The notes slid into a wild, remote air : cold moonlight on the dark o' the sea, it was. It was the *Dàn-nan-Ròn.*

Anne flushed, trembled, and then abruptly rose. As she leaned on her clenched right hand upon the table, the light of the peats showed that her eyes were aflame.

" Why do you play *that*, Gloom Achanna ? "

The man finished the bar, then blew into the oaten pipe, before, just glancing at the girl, he replied :

" And what harm will there be in *that*, Anna-ban ? "

"You know it is harm. That is the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'!"

"Ay, and what then, Anna-ban?"

"What then? Are you thinking I don't know what you mean by playing the 'Song o' the Seals'?"

With an abrupt gesture Gloom put the feadan aside. As he did so, he rose.

"See here, Anne," he began roughly, when Marcus intervened.

"That will do just now, Gloom. Anne-à-ghraidh, do you mean that you are going to do this thing?"

"Ay, sure."

"Do you know why Gloom played the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'?"

"It was a cruel thing."

"You know what is said in the isles about—about—this or that man, who is under *gheasan*, who is spell-bound, and—and—about the seals——"

"Yes, Marcus, it is knowing it that I am: '*Tha iad a' cantuinn gur h-e daoine fo gheasan a th' anns no roin.*'"

"'*They say that seals,*'" he repeated slowly, "'*They say that seals are men under magic spells.*' And have you ever pondered that thing, Anne, my cousin?"

"I am knowing well what you mean."

"Then you will know that the MacCodrums of North Uist are called the *Sliochd-nan-Ròn?*"

"I have heard."

"And would you be for marrying a man that is of the race of the beasts, and himself knowing what that *geas* means, and who may any day go back to his people?"

"Ah, now, Marcus, sure it is making a mock of me you are. Neither you nor any here believe that foolish thing. How can a man born of a woman be a seal, even though

his *sinnsear* were the offspring of the sea-people? which is not a saying I am believing either, though it may be; and not that it matters much, whatever, about the far-back forbears."

Marcus frowned darkly, and at first made no response. At last he answered, speaking sullenly:

"You may be believing this or you may be believing that, Anna-nic-Gilleasbuig, but two things are as well known as that the east wind brings the blight and the west wind the rain. And one is this: that long ago a seal-man wedded a woman of North Uist, and that he or his son was called Neil MacCodrum; and that the sea-fever of the seal was in the blood of his line ever after. And this is the other: that twice within the memory of living folk, a MacCodrum has taken upon himself the form of a seal, and has so met his death, once Neil MacCodrum of the Ru' Tormaid, and once Anndra MacCodrum of Berneray in the Sound. There's talk of others, but these are known of us all. And you will not be forgetting now that Neildonn was the grandfather, and that Anndra was the brother of the father of Mànus MacCodrum?"

"I am not caring what you say, Marcus. It is all foam of the sea."

"There's no foam without wind or tide, Anne, an' it's a dark tide that will be bearing you away to Uist, and a black wind that will be blowing far away behind the east, the wind that will be carrying his death-cry to your ears."

The girl shuddered. The brave spirit in her, however, did not quail.

"Well, so be it. To each his fate. But, seal or no seal, I am going to wed Mànus MacCodrum, who is a man

as good as any here, and a true man at that, and the man I love, and that will be my man, God willing, the praise be His!"

Again Gloom took up the feadan, and sent a few cold, white notes floating through the hot room, breaking, suddenly, into the wild, fantastic, opening air of the "Dànnan-Ròn."

With a low cry and passionate gesture Anne sprang forward, snatched the oat-flute from his grasp, and would have thrown it in the fire. Marcus held her in an iron grip, however.

"Don't you be minding Gloom, Anne," he said quietly, as he took the feadan from her hand and handed it to his brother; "sure, he's only telling you in *his* way what I am telling you in mine."

She shook herself free, and moved to the other side of the table. On the opposite wall hung the dirk which had belonged to the old Achanna. This she unfastened. Holding it in her right hand, she faced the three men.

"On the cross of the dirk I swear I will be the woman of Mànus MacCodrum."

The brothers made no response. They looked at her fixedly.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if any man comes between me and Mànus, this dirk will be for his remembering in a certain hour of the day of the days."

As she spoke, she looked meaningly at Gloom, whom she feared more than Marcus or Seumas.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if evil comes to Mànus, this dirk will have another sheath, and that will

be my milkless breast ; and by that token I now throw the old sheath in the fire."

As she finished, she threw the sheath on to the burning peats. Gloom quietly lifted it, brushed off the sparks of flame as though they were dust, and put it in his pocket.

" And by the same token, Anne," he said, " your oaths will come to nought."

Rising, he made a sign to his brothers to follow. When they were outside he told Seumas to return, and to keep Anne within, by peace if possible, by force if not. Briefly they discussed their plans, and then separated. While Seumas went back, Marcus and Gloom made their way to the haven.

Their black figures were visible in the moonlight, but at first they were not noticed by the men on board the *Luath*, for Mànus was singing.

When the islesman stopped abruptly, one of his companions asked him jokingly if his song had brought a seal alongside, and bid him beware lest it was a woman of the sea-people.

His face darkened, but he made no reply. When the others listened they heard the wild strain of the " Dàn-nan-Ròn " stealing through the moonshine. Staring against the shore, they could discern the two brothers.

" What will be the meaning of that ? " asked one of the men uneasily.

" When a man comes instead of a woman," answered Mànus slowly, " the young corbies are astir in the nest."

So, it meant blood. Aulay MacNeil and Donull MacDonull put down their gear, rose, and stood waiting for what Mànus would do.

"Ho, there!" he cried.

"Ho-ro!"

"What will you be wanting, Eilanmore?"

"We are wanting a word of you, Mànus MacCodrum. Will you come ashore?"

"If you want a word of me, you can come to me."

"There is no boat here."

"I'll send the *bàta-beag*."

When he had spoken, Mànus asked Donull, the younger of his mates, a lad of seventeen, to row to the shore."

"And bring back no more than one man," he added, "whether it be Eilanmore himself or Gloom-mhic-Achanna."

The rope of the small boat was unfastened, and Donull rowed it swiftly through the moonshine. The passing of a cloud dusked the shore, but they saw him throw a rope for the guiding of the boat alongside the ledge of the landing-place; then the sudden darkening obscured the vision. Donull must be talking, they thought, for two or three minutes elapsed without sign, but at last the boat put off again, and with two figures only. Doubtless the lad had had to argue against the coming of both Marcus and Gloom.

This, in truth, was what Donull had done. But while he was speaking Marcus was staring fixedly beyond him.

"Who is it that is there?" he asked, "there, in the stern?"

"There is no one there."

"I thought I saw the shadow of a man."

"Then it was my shadow, Eilanmore."

Achanna turned to his brother.

"I see a man's death there in the boat."

Gloom quailed for a moment, then laughed low.

"I see no death of a man sitting in the boat, Marcus, but if I did I am thinking it would dance to the air of the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn,' which is more than the wraith of you or me would do."

"It is not a wraith I was seeing, but the death of a man."

Gloom whispered, and his brother nodded sullenly. The next moment a heavy muffler was round Donull's mouth; and before he could resist, or even guess what had happened, he was on his face on the shore, bound and gagged. A minute later the oars were taken by Gloom, and the boat moved swiftly out of the inner haven.

As it drew near Mànus stared at it intently.

"That is not Donull that is rowing, Aulay!"

"No: it will be Gloom Achanna, I'm thinking."

MacCodrum started. If so, that other figure at the stern was too big for Donull. The cloud passed just as the boat came alongside. The rope was made secure, and then Marcus and Gloom sprang on board.

"Where is Donull MacDonull?" demanded Mànus sharply.

Marcus made no reply, so Gloom answered for him.

"He has gone up to the house with a message to Annenic-Gilleasbuig."

"And what will that message be?"

"That Mànus MacCodrum has sailed away from Eilanmore, and will not see her again."

MacCodrum laughed. It was a low, ugly laugh.

"Sure, Gloom Achanna, you should be taking that

feadan of yours and playing the *Codhail-nan-Pairtean*, for I'm thinkin' the crabs are gathering about the rocks down below us, an' laughing wi' their claws."

"Well, and that is a true thing," Gloom replied slowly and quietly. "Yes, for sure I might, as you say, be playing the 'Meeting of the Crabs.' Perhaps," he added, as by a sudden afterthought, "perhaps, though it is a calm night, you will be hearing the *comh-thonn*. The 'slapping of the waves' is a better thing to be hearing than the 'Meeting of the Crabs.'"

"If I hear the *comh-thonn* it is not in the way you will be meaning, Gloom-mhic-Achanna. 'Tis not the 'up sail and good-bye' they will be saying, but 'Home wi' the Bride.'"

Here Marcus intervened.

"Let us be having no more words, Mànus MacCodrum. The girl Anne is not for you. Gloom is to be her man. So get you hence. If you will be going quiet, it is quiet we will be. If you have your feet on this thing, then you will be having that too which I saw in the boat."

"And what was it you saw in the boat, Achanna?"

"The death of a man."

"So——. And now" (this after a prolonged silence, wherein the four men stood facing each other) "is it a blood-matter if not of peace?"

"Ay. Go, if you are wise. If not, 'tis your own death you will be making."

There was a flash as of summer lightning. A bluish flame seemed to leap through the moonshine. Marcus reeled, with a gasping cry; then, leaning back, till his face blanched in the moonlight, his knees gave way. As he

fell, he turned half round. The long knife which Mànus had hurled at him had not penetrated his breast more than an inch at most, but as he fell on the deck it was driven into him up to the hilt.

In the blank silence that followed, the three men could hear a sound like the ebb-tide in seaweed. It was the gurgling of the bloody froth in the lungs of the dead man.

The first to speak was his brother, and then only when thin reddish-white foam-bubbles began to burst from the blue lips of Marcus.

"It is murder."

He spoke low, but it was like the surf of breakers in the ears of those who heard.

"You have said one part of a true word, Gloom Achanna. It is murder—that you and he came here for!"

"The death of Marcus Achanna is on you, Mànus MacCodrum."

"So be it, as between yourself and me, or between all of your blood and me; though Aulay MacNeil as well as you can witness that though in self-defence I threw the knife at Achanna, it was his own doing that drove it into him."

"You can whisper that to the rope when it is round your neck."

"And what will *you* be doing now, Gloom-mhic-Achanna?"

For the first time Gloom shifted uneasily. A swift glance revealed to him the awkward fact that the boat trailed behind the *Luath*, so that he could not leap into it, while if he turned to haul it close by the rope he was at the mercy of the two men.

"I will go in peace," he said quietly.

"Ay," was the answer, in an equally quiet tone, "in the white peace."

Upon this menace of death the two men stood facing each other.

Achanna broke the silence at last.

"You'll hear the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn' the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum, and lest you doubt it you'll hear it again in your death-hour."

"*Ma tha sin an Dàn*—if that be ordained." Mànus spoke gravely. His very quietude, however, boded ill. There was no hope of clemency; Gloom knew that.

Suddenly he laughed scornfully. Then, pointing with his right hand as if to some one behind his two adversaries, he cried out: "Put the death-hand on them, Marcus! Give them the Grave!" Both men sprang aside, the heart of each nigh upon bursting. The death-touch of the newly slain is an awful thing to incur, for it means that the wraith can transfer all its evil to the person touched.

The next moment there was a heavy splash. Mànus realised that it was no more than a ruse, and that Gloom had escaped. With feverish haste he hauled in the small boat, leaped into it, and began at once to row so as to intercept his enemy.

Achanna rose once, between him and the *Luath*. MacCodrum crossed the oars in the thole-pins and seized the boat-hook.

The swimmer kept straight for him. Suddenly he dived. In a flash Mànus knew that Gloom was going to rise under the boat, seize the keel, and upset him, and thus probably be able to grip him from above. There was time,

and no more, to leap ; and, indeed, scarce had he plunged into the sea ere the boat swung right over, Achanna clambering over it the next moment.

At first Gloom could not see where his foe was. He crouched on the upturned craft, and peered eagerly into the moonlit water. All at once a black mass shot out of the shadow between him and the smack. This black mass laughed—the same low, ugly laugh that had preceded the death of Marcus.

He who was in turn the swimmer was now close. When a fathom away he leaned back and began to tread water steadily. In his right hand he grasped the boat-hook. The man in the boat knew that to stay where he was meant certain death. He gathered himself together like a crouching cat. Mànus kept treading the water slowly, but with the hook ready so that the sharp iron spike at the end of it should transfix his foe if he came at him with a leap. Now and again he laughed. Then in his low sweet voice, but brokenly at times between his deep breathings, he began to sing :

The tide was dark, an' heavy with the burden that it bore ;
I heard it talkin', whisperin', upon the weedy shore ;
Each wave that stirred the seaweed was like a closing door ;
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
My Grief,
No more !

The tide was in the salt seaweed, and like a knife it tore ;
The wild sea-wind went moaning, sooing, moaning o'er and o'er ;
The deep sea-heart was brooding deep upon its ancient lore—
I heard the sob, the sooing sob, the dying sob at its core,
My Grief,
Its core !

The white sea-waves were wan and grey its ashy lips before,
The yeast within its ravening mouth was red with streaming gore;
O red seaweed, O red sea-waves, O hollow baffled roar,
Since one thou hast, O dark dim Sea, why callest thou for more,
My Grief,
For more?

In the quiet moonlight the chant, with its long, slow cadences, sung as no other man in the isles could sing it, sounded sweet and remote beyond words to tell. The glittering shine was upon the water of the haven, and moved in waving lines of fire along the stone ledges. Sometimes a fish rose, and spilt a ripple of pale gold; or a sea-nettle swam to the surface, and turned its blue or greenish globe of living jelly to the moon dazzle.

The man in the water made a sudden stop in his treading and listened intently. Then once more the phosphorescent light gleamed about his slow-moving shoulders. In a louder chanting voice came once again:

Each wave that stirs the seaweed is like a closing door;
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
My Grief,
No more!

Yes, his quick ears had caught the inland strain of a voice he knew. Soft and white as the moonshine came Anne's singing as she passed along the corrie leading to the haven. In vain his travelling gaze sought her: she was still in the shadow, and, besides, a slow-drifting cloud obscured the moonlight. When he looked back again a stifled exclamation came from his lips. There was not a sign of Gloom Achanna. He had slipped noiselessly from the boat, and was now either behind it, or had dived beneath it, or was swimming under water this way or that.

If only the cloud would sail by, muttered Mànus, as he held himself in readiness for an attack from beneath or behind. As the dusk lightened, he swam slowly towards the boat, and then swiftly round it. There was no one there. He climbed on to the keel, and stood, leaning forward, as a salmon-leisterer by torchlight, with his spear-pointed boat-hook raised. Neither below nor beyond could he discern any shape. A whispered call to Aulay MacNeil showed that he, too, saw nothing. Gloom must have swooned, and sank deep as he slipped through the water. Perhaps the dog-fish were already darting about him.

Going behind the boat Mànus guided it back to the smack. It was not long before, with MacNeil's help, he righted the punt. One oar had drifted out of sight, but as there was a sculling-hole in the stern that did not matter.

"What shall we do with it?" he muttered, as he stood at last by the corpse of Marcus. "This is a bad night for us, Aulay!"

"Bad it is; but let us be seeing it is not worse. I'm thinking we should have left the boat."

"And for why that?"

"We could say that Marcus Achanna and Gloom Achanna left us again, and that we saw no more of them nor of our boat."

MacCodrum pondered a while. The sound of voices, borne faintly across the water, decided him. Probably Anne and the lad Donull were talking. He slipped into the boat, and with a sail-knife soon ripped it here and there. It filled, and then, heavy with the weight of a great ballast-stone which Aulay had first handed to his companion, and surging with a foot-thrust from the latter, it sank.

"We'll hide the—the man there—behind the windlass, below the spare sail, till we're out at sea, Aulay. Quick, give me a hand!"

It did not take the two men long to lift the corpse, and do as Mànus had suggested. They had scarce accomplished this, when Anne's voice came hailing silver-sweet across the water.

With death-white face and shaking limbs, MacCodrum stood holding the mast, while with a loud voice, so firm and strong that Aulay MacNeil smiled below his fear, he asked if the Achannas were back yet, and if so for Donull to row out at once, and she with him, if she would come.

It was nearly half an hour thereafter that Anne rowed out towards the *Luath*. She had gone at last along the shore to a creek where one of Marcus's boats was moored, and returned with it. Having taken Donull on board, she made way with all speed, fearful lest Gloom or Marcus should intercept her.

It did not take long to explain how she had laughed at Seumas's vain efforts to detain her, and had come down to the haven. As she approached, she heard Mànus singing, and so had herself broken into a song she knew he loved. Then, by the water-edge, she had come upon Donull lying upon his back, bound and gagged. After she had released him they waited to see what would happen, but as in the moonlight they could not see any small boat come in, bound to or from the smack, she had hailed to know if Mànus were there.

On his side he said briefly that the two Achannas had come to persuade him to leave without her. On his refusal they had departed again, uttering threats against her as well

as himself. He heard their quarrelling voices as they rowed into the gloom, but could not see them at last because of the obscured moonlight.

"And now, Ann-mochree," he added, "is it coming with me you are, and just as you are? Sure, you'll never repent it, and you'll have all you want that I can give. Dear of my heart, say that you will be coming away this night of the nights! By the Black Stone on Icolmkill I swear it, and by the Sun, and by the Moon, and by Himself!"

"I am trusting you, Mànus dear. Sure it is not for me to be going back to that house after what has been done and said. I go with you, now and always, God save us."

"Well, dear lass o' my heart, it's farewell to Eilanmore it is, for by the Blood on the Cross I'll never land on it again!"

"And that will be no sorrow to me, Mànus my home!"

And this was the way that my friend Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore to go to the isles of the west.

It was a fair sailing, in the white moonshine, with a whispering breeze astern. Anne leaned against Mànus, dreaming her dream. The lad Donull sat drowsing at the helm. Forward, Aulay MacNeil, with his face set against the moonshine to the west, brooded dark.

Though no longer was land in sight, and there was peace among the deeps of the quiet stars and upon the sea, the shadow of fear was upon the face of Mànus MacCodrum.

This might well have been because of the as yet unburied dead that lay beneath the spare sail by the windlass. The dead man, however, did not affright him. What went moaning in his heart, and sighing and calling in his brain, was a faint falling echo he had heard, as the *Luath* glided

slow out of the haven. Whether from the water or from the shore he could not tell, but he heard the wild, fantastic air of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," as he had heard it that very night upon the feadan of Gloom Achanna.

It was his hope that his ears had played him false. When he glanced about him, and saw the sombre flame in the eyes of Aulay MacNeil, staring at him out of the dusk, he knew that which Oisìn the son of Fionn cried in his pain; "his soul swam in mist."

II

For all the evil omens, the marriage of Anne and Mànus MacCodrum went well. He was more silent than of yore, and men avoided rather than sought him; but he was happy with Anne, and content with his two mates, who were now Callum MacCodrum and Ranald MacRanald. The youth Donull had bettered himself by joining a Skye skipper who was a kinsman, and Aulay MacNeil had surprised every one, except Mànus, by going away as a seaman on board one of the *Loch* line of ships which sail for Australia from the Clyde.

Anne never knew what had happened, though it is possible she suspected somewhat. All that was known to her was that Marcus and Gloom Achanna had disappeared, and were supposed to have been drowned. There was now no Achanna upon Eilanmore, for Seumas had taken a horror of the place and his loneliness. As soon as it was commonly admitted that his two brothers must have drifted out to sea and been drowned, or at best picked up by some ocean-going ship, he disposed of the island-farm, and left Eilanmore for ever. All this confirmed the thing

said among the islanders of the west, that old Robert Achanna had brought a curse with him. Blight and disaster had visited Eilanmore over and over in the many years he had held it, and death, sometimes tragic or mysterious, had overtaken six of his seven sons, while the youngest bore upon his brows the "dusk of the shadow." True, none knew for certain that three out of the six were dead, but few for a moment believed in the possibility that Alasdair and Marcus and Gloom were alive. On the night when Anne had left the island with Mànus MacCodrum, he, Seumas, had heard nothing to alarm him. Even when, an hour after she had gone down to the haven, neither she nor his brothers had returned, and the *Luath* had put out to sea, he was not in fear of any ill. Clearly, Marcus and Gloom had gone away in the smack, perhaps determined to see that the girl was duly married by priest or minister. He would have perturbed himself little for days to come, but for a strange thing that happened that night. He had returned to the house because of a chill that was upon him, and convinced too that all had sailed in the *Luath*. He was sitting brooding by the peat-fire, when he was startled by a sound at the window at the back of the room. A few bars of a familiar air struck painfully upon his ear, though played so low that they were just audible. What could it be but the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," and who would be playing that but Gloom? What did it mean? Perhaps, after all, it was fantasy only, and there was no feadan out there in the dark. He was pondering this when, still low but louder and sharper than before, there rose and fell the strain which he hated, and Gloom never played before him, that of the *Dàvsa-na-mairv*, the "Dance of the Dead." Swiftly and

silently he rose and crossed the room. In the dark shadows cast by the byre he could see nothing, but the music ceased. He went out, and searched everywhere, but found no one. So he returned, took down the Holy Book with awed heart, and read slowly till peace came upon him, soft and sweet as the warmth of the peat-glow.

But as for Anne, she had never even this hint that one of the supposed dead might be alive, or that, being dead, Gloom might yet touch a shadowy feadan into a wild, remote air of the grave.

When month after month went by, and no hint of ill came to break upon their peace, Mànus grew light-hearted again. Once more his songs were heard as he came back from the fishing, or loitered ashore mending his nets. A new happiness was nigh to them, for Anne was with child. True, there was fear also, for the girl was not well at the time when her labour was near, and grew weaker daily. There came a day when Mànus had to go to Loch Boisdale in South Uist, and it was with pain and something of foreboding that he sailed away from Berneray in the Sound of Harris, where he lived. It was on the third night that he returned. He was met by Katreen MacRanald, the wife of his mate, with the news that on the morrow after his going Anne had sent for the priest who was staying at Loch Maddy, for she had felt the coming of death. It was that very evening she died, and took the child with her.

Mànus heard as one in a dream. It seemed to him that the tide was ebbing in his heart, and a cold, sleety rain falling, falling through a mist in his brain.

Sorrow lay heavily upon him. After the earthing of

her whom he loved, he went to and fro solitary: often crossing the Narrows and going to the old Pictish Towre under the shadow of Ban Breac. He would not go upon the sea, but let his kinsman Callum do as he liked with the *Luath*.

Now and again Father Allan MacNeil sailed northward to see him. Each time he departed sadder. "The man is going mad, I fear," he said to Callum, the last time he saw Mànus.

The long summer nights brought peace and beauty to the isles. It was a great herring year, and the moon-fishing was unusually good. All the Uist men who lived by the sea-harvest were in their boats whenever they could. The pollack, the dogfish, the otters, and the seals, with flocks of sea-fowl beyond number, shared in the common joy. Mànus MacCodrum alone paid no heed to herring or mackerel. He was often seen striding along the shore, and more than once had been heard laughing; sometimes, too, he was come upon at low tide by the great Reef of Berneray, singing wild, strange runes and songs, or crouching upon a rock and brooding dark.

The midsummer moon found no man on Berneray except MacCodrum, the Rev. Mr. Black, the minister of the Free Kirk, and an old man named Anndra McIan. On the night before the last day of the middle month, Anndra was reproved by the minister for saying that he had seen a man rise out of one of the graves in the kirkyard, and steal down by the stone-dykes towards Balnahunnur-sa-mona,[1] where Mànus MacCodrum lived.

"The dead do not rise and walk, Anndra."

[1] *Baille-'na-aonar' sa mhonadh*, "the solitary farm on the hill-slope."

"That may be, maigstir, but it may have been the Watcher of the Dead. Sure it is not three weeks since Padruig McAlistair was laid beneath the green mound. He'll be wearying for another to take his place."

"Hoots, man, that is an old superstition. The dead do not rise and walk, I tell you."

"It is right you may be, maigstir, but I heard of this from my father, that was old before you were young, and from his father before him. When the last-buried is weary with being the Watcher of the Dead he goes about from place to place till he sees man, woman, or child with the death-shadow in the eyes, and then he goes back to his grave and lies down in peace, for his vigil it will be over now."

The minister laughed at the folly, and went into his house to make ready for the Sacrament that was to be on the morrow. Old Anndra, however, was uneasy. After the porridge, he went down through the gloaming to Balnahunnur-sa-mona. He meant to go in and warn Mànus MacCodrum. But when he got to the west wall, and stood near the open window, he heard Mànus speaking in a loud voice, though he was alone in the room.

"*B'ionganntach do ghràdh dhomhsa, a' toirt barrachd air gràdh nam ban!*" . . .[1]

This, Mànus cried in a voice quivering with pain. Anndra stopped still, fearful to intrude, fearful also, perhaps, to see some one there beside MacCodrum whom eyes should not see. Then the voice rose into a cry of agony.

"*Aoram dhuit, ay an déigh dhomh fàs aosda!*"[2]

[1] "Thy love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women."
[2] "I shall worship thee, ay, even after I have become old."

With that Anndra feared to stay. As he passed the byre he started, for he thought he saw the shadow of a man. When he looked closer he could see nought, so went his way, trembling and sore troubled.

It was dusk when Mànus came out. He saw that it was to be a cloudy night ; and perhaps it was this that, after a brief while, made him turn in his aimless walk and go back to the house. He was sitting before the flaming heart of the peats, brooding in his pain, when suddenly he sprang to his feet.

Loud and clear, and close as though played under the very window of the room, came the cold, white notes of an oaten flute. Ah, too well he knew that wild, fantastic air. Who could it be but Gloom Achanna, playing upon his feadan ; and what air of all airs could that be but the " Dàn-nan-Ròn " ?

Was it the dead man, standing there unseen in the shadow of the Grave ? Was Marcus beside him, Marcus with the knife still thrust up to the hilt, and the lung-foam upon his lips ? Can the sea give up its dead ? Can there be strain of any feadan that ever was made of man, there in the Silence ?

In vain Mànus MacCodrum tortured himself thus. Too well he knew that he had heard the " Dàn-nan-Ròn," and that no other than Gloom Achanna was the player.

Suddenly an access of fury wrought him to madness. With an abrupt lilt the tune swung into the *Davsà-na-mairv*, and thence, after a few seconds, and in a moment, into that mysterious and horrible *Codhail-nan-Pairtean* which none but Gloom played.

There could be no mistake now, nor as to what was meant by the muttering, jerking air of the "Gathering of the Crabs."

With a savage cry Mànus snatched up a long dirk from its place by the chimney, and rushed out.

There was not the shadow of a sea-gull even in front; so he sped round by the byre. Neither was anything unusual discoverable there.

"Sorrow upon me," he cried; "man or wraith, I will be putting it to the dirk!"

But there was no one; nothing; not a sound.

Then, at last, with a listless droop of his arms, MacCodrum turned and went into the house again. He remembered what Gloom Achanna had said: "*You'll hear the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn' the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum, and lest you doubt it, you'll hear it in your death-hour.*"

He did not stir from the fire for three hours; then he rose, and went over to his bed and lay down without undressing.

He did not sleep, but lay listening and watching. The peats burned low, and at last there was scarce a flicker along the floor. Outside he could hear the wind moaning upon the sea. By a strange rustling sound he knew that the tide was ebbing across the great reef that runs out from Berneray. By midnight the clouds had gone. The moon shone clear and full. When he heard the clock strike in its worm-eaten, rickety case, he sat up, and listened intently. He could hear nothing. No shadow stirred. Surely if the wraith of Gloom Achanna were waiting for him it would make some sign now, in the dead of night.

An hour passed. Mànus rose, crossed the room on tip-toe, and soundlessly opened the door. The salt wind blew fresh against his face. The smell of the shore, of wet sea-wrack and pungent bog-myrtle, of foam and moving water, came sweet to his nostrils. He heard a skua calling from the rocky promontory. From the slopes behind, the wail of a moon-restless lapwing rose and fell mournfully.

Crouching and with slow, stealthy step, he stole round by the seaward wall. At the dyke he stopped, and scrutinised it on each side. He could see for several hundred yards, and there was not even a sheltering sheep. Then, soundlessly as ever, he crept close to the byre. He put his ear to chink after chink : but not a stir of a shadow, even. As a shadow himself, he drifted lightly to the front, past the hayrick ; then, with swift glances to right and left, opened the door and entered. As he did so, he stood as though frozen. Surely, he thought, that was a sound as of a step, out there by the hayrick. A terror was at his heart. In front, the darkness of the byre, with God knows what dread thing awaiting him ; behind, a mysterious walker in the night, swift to take him unawares. The trembling that came upon him was nigh overmastering. At last, with a great effort, he moved towards the ledge, where he kept a candle. With shaking hand he struck a light. The empty byre looked ghostly and fearsome in the flickering gloom. But there was no one, nothing. He was about to turn, when a rat ran along a loose, hanging beam, and stared at him, or at the yellow shine. He saw its black eyes shining like peat-water in moonlight.

The creature was curious at first, then indifferent. At last, it began to squeak, and then make a swift scratching

with its forepaws. Once or twice came an answering squeak ; a faint rustling was audible here and there among the straw.

With a sudden spring Mànus seized the beast. Even in the second in which he raised it to his mouth and scrunched its back with his strong teeth, it bit him severely. He let his hands drop, and grope furtively in the darkness. With stooping head he shook the last breath out of the rat, holding it with his front teeth, with back-curled lips. The next moment he dropped the dead thing, trampled upon it, and burst out laughing. There was a scurrying of pattering feet, a rustling of straw. Then silence again. A draught from the door had caught the flame and extinguished it. In the silence and darkness MacCodrum stood, intent, but no longer afraid. He laughed again, because it was so easy to kill with the teeth. The noise of his laughter seemed to him to leap hither and thither like a shadowy ape. He could see it : a blackness within the darkness. Once more he laughed. It amused him to see the *thing* leaping about like that.

Suddenly he turned, and walked out into the moonlight. The lapwing was still circling and wailing. He mocked it, with loud, shrill *pēē-wēēty*, *pēē-wēēty*, *pēē-wēēt*. The bird swung waywardly, alarmed : its abrupt cry and dancing flight aroused its fellows. The air was full of the lamentable crying of plovers.

A sough of the sea came inland. Mànus inhaled its breath with a sigh of delight. A passion for the running wave was upon him. He yearned to feel green water break against his breast. Thirst and hunger, too, he felt at last, though he had known neither all day. How cool and

sweet, he thought, would be a silver haddock, or even a brown-backed liath, alive and gleaming, wet with the sea-water still bubbling in its gills. It would writhe, just like the rat ; but then how he would throw his head back, and toss the glittering thing up into the moonlight, catch it on the downwhirl just as it neared the wave on whose crest he was, and then devour it with swift, voracious gulps !

With quick, jerky steps he made his way past the landward side of the small, thatch-roofed cottage. He was about to enter, when he noticed that the door, which he had left ajar, was closed. He stole to the window and glanced in.

A single, thin, wavering moonbeam flickered in the room. But the flame at the heart of the peats had worked its way through the ash, and there was now a dull glow, though that was within the "smooring," and threw scarce more than a glimmer into the room.

There was enough light, however, for Mànus MacCodrum to see that a man sat on the three-legged stool before the fire. His head was bent, as though he were listening. The face was away from the window. It was his own wraith, of course ; of that Mànus felt convinced. What was it doing there ? Perhaps it had eaten the Holy Book, so that it was beyond his putting a *rosad* on it ! At the thought he laughed loud. The shadow-man leaped to his feet.

The next moment MacCodrum swung himself on to the thatched roof, and clambered from rope to rope, where these held down the big stones which acted as dead-weight for thatch against the fury of tempests. Stone after stone he tore from its fastenings, and hurled to the ground over

beyond the door. Then with tearing hands he began to burrow an opening in the thatch. All the time he whined like a beast.

He was glad the moon shone full upon him. When he had made a big enough hole, he would see the evil thing out of the grave that sat in his room and would stone it to death.

Suddenly he became still. A cold sweat broke out upon him. The thing, whether his own wraith, or the spirit of his dead foe, or Gloom Achanna himself, had begun to play, low and slow, a wild air. No piercing, cold music like that of the feadan ! Too well he knew it, and those cool, white notes that moved here and there in the darkness like snowflakes. As for the air, though he slept till Judgment Day and heard but a note of it amidst all the clamour of heaven and hell, sure he would scream because of the " Dàn-nan-Ròn."

The " Dàn-nan-Ròn " : the *Roin !* the Seals ! Ah, what was he doing there, on the bitter-weary land ? Out there was the sea. Safe would he be in the green waves.

With a leap he was on the ground. Seizing a huge stone he hurled it through the window. Then, laughing and screaming, he fled towards the Great Reef, along whose sides the ebb-tide gurgled and sobbed, with glistening white foam.

He ceased screaming or laughing as he heard the " Dàn-nan-Ròn " behind him, faint, but following ; sure, following. Bending low, he raced towards the rock-ledges from which ran the reef.

When at last he reached the extreme ledge he stopped abruptly. Out on the reef he saw from ten to twenty seals,

some swimming to and fro, others clinging to the reef, one or two making a curious barking sound, with round heads lifted against the moon. In one place there was a surge and lashing of water. Two bulls were fighting to the death.

With swift, stealthy movements Mànus unclothed himself. The damp had clotted the leathern thongs of his boots, and he snarled with curled lip as he tore at them. He shone white in the moonshine, but was sheltered from the sea by the ledge behind which he crouched. "What did Gloom Achanna mean by that?" he muttered savagely, as he heard the nearing air change into the "Dance of the Dead." For a moment Mànus was a man again. He was nigh upon turning to face his foe, corpse or wraith or living body; to spring at this thing which followed him, and tear it with hands and teeth. Then, once more, the hated "Song of the Seals" stole mockingly through the night.

With a shiver he slipped into the dark water. Then with quick, powerful strokes he was in the moon-flood, and swimming hard against it out by the leeside of the reef.

So intent were the seals upon the fight of the two great bulls that they did not see the swimmer, or if they did, took him for one of their own people. A savage snarling and barking and half-human crying came from them. Mànus was almost within reach of the nearest, when one of the combatants sank dead, with torn throat. The victor clambered on the reef, and leaned high, swaying its great head and shoulders to and fro. In the moonlight its white fangs were like red coral. Its blinded eyes ran with gore.

There was a rush, a rapid leaping and swirling, as

Mànus surged in among the seals, which were swimming round the place where the slain bull had sunk.

The laughter of this long, white seal terrified them.

When his knees struck against a rock, MacCodrum groped with his arms, and hauled himself out of the water.

From rock to rock and ledge to ledge he went, with a fantastic, dancing motion, his body gleaming foam-white in the moonshine.

As he pranced and trampled along the weedy ledges, he sang snatches of an old rune—the lost rune of the MacCodrums of Uist. The seals on the rocks crouched spellbound ; those slow-swimming in the water stared with brown, unwinking eyes, with their small ears strained against the sound :

It is I, Mànus MacCodrum,
I am telling you that, you, Anndra of my blood,
And you, Neil my grandfather, and you, and you, and you !
Ay, ay, Mànus my name is, Mànus MacMànus !
It is I myself and no other.
Your brother, O Seals of the Sea !
Give me blood of the red fish,
And a bite of the flying *sgadan :*
The green wave on my belly,
And the foam in my eyes !
I am your bull-brother, O Bulls of the Sea,
Bull—better than any of you, snarling bulls !
Come to me, mate, seal of the soft, furry womb,
White am I still, though red shall I be,
Red with the streaming red blood if any dispute me !
Aoh, aoh, aoh, arò, arò, ho-rò !
A man was I, a seal am I,
My fangs churn the yellow foam from my lips :
Give way to me, give way to me, Seals of the Sea ;
Give way, for I am fëy of the sea
And the sea-maiden I see there,
And my name, true, is Mànus MacCodrum,
The bull-seal that was a man, Arà ! Arà !

By this time he was close upon the great black seal, which was still monotonously swaying its gory head, with its sightless eyes rolling this way and that. The sea-folk seemed fascinated. None moved, even when the dancer in the moonshine trampled upon them.

When he came within arm-reach he stopped. "Are you the Ceann-Cinnidh?" he cried. "Are you the head of this clan of the sea-folk?"

The huge beast ceased its swaying. Its curled lips moved from its fangs.

"Speak, Seal, if there's no curse upon you! Maybe, now, you'll be Anndra himself, the brother of my father! Speak! *H'st—are you hearing that music on the shore?* 'Tis the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'! Death o' my soul, it's the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'! Aha, 'tis Gloom Achanna out of the Grave. Back, beast, and let me move on!"

With that, seeing the great bull did not move, he struck it full in the face with clenched fist. There was a hoarse, strangling roar, and the seal-champion was upon him with lacerating fangs.

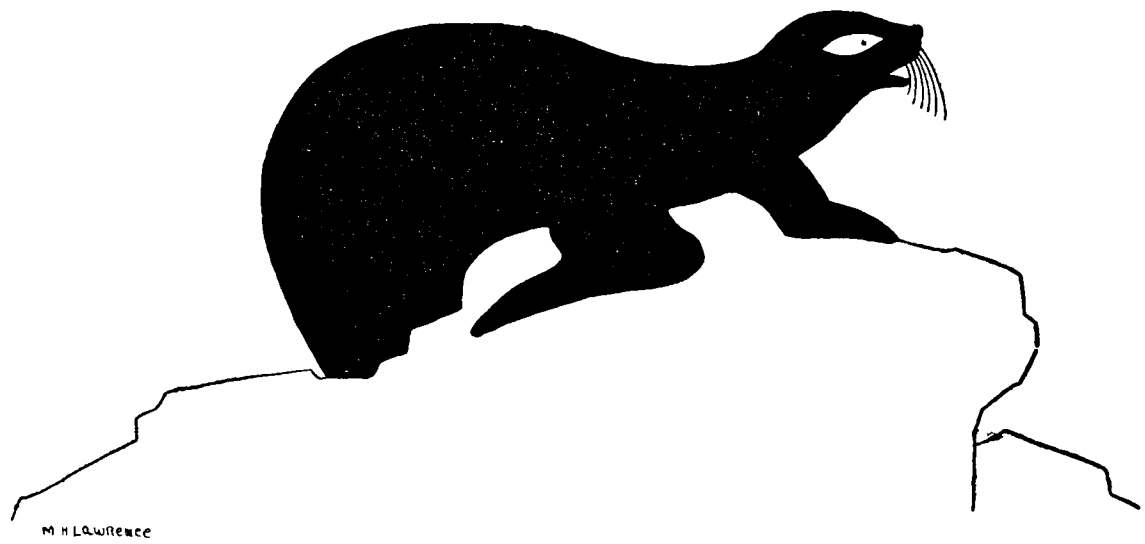
Mànus swayed this way and that. All he could hear now was the snarling and growling and choking cries of the maddened seals. As he fell, they closed in upon him. His screams wheeled through the night like mad birds. With desperate fury he struggled to free himself. The great bull pinned him to the rock; a dozen others tore at his white flesh, till his spouting blood made the rocks scarlet in the white shine of the moon.

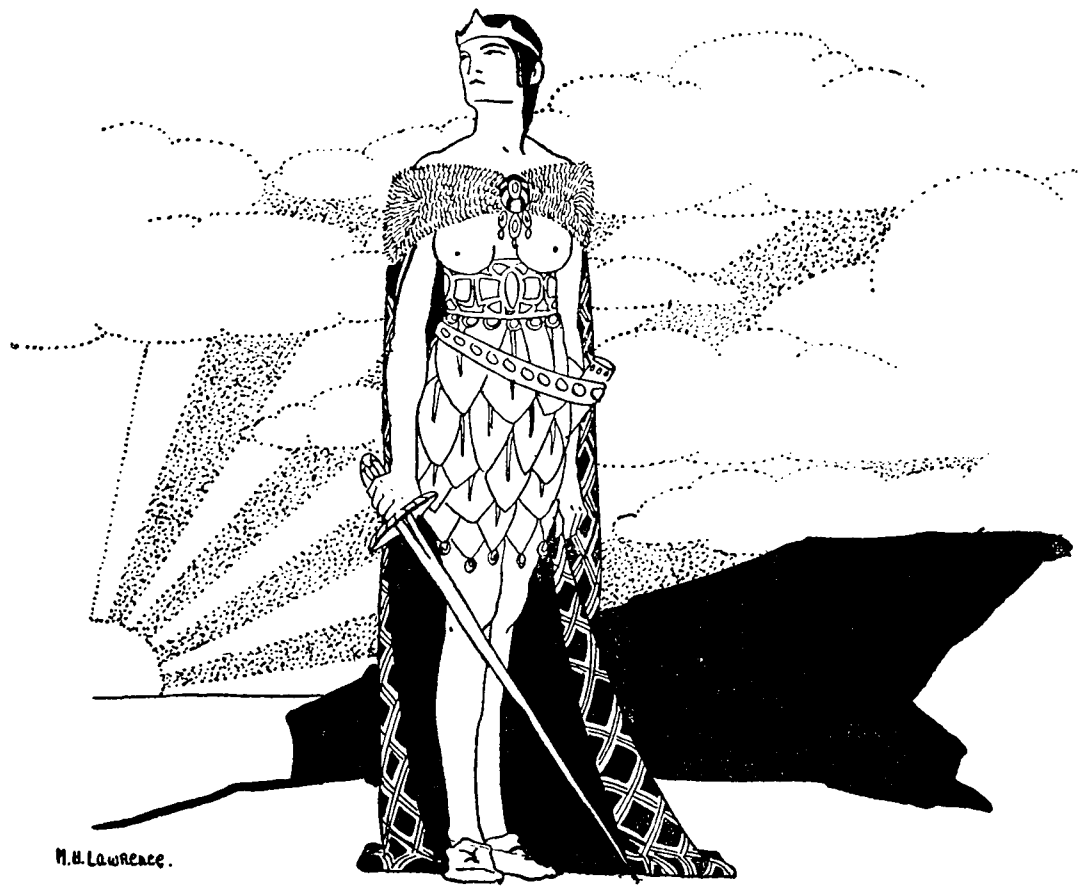
For a few seconds he still fought savagely, tearing with teeth and hands. Once, a red irrecognisable mass, he staggered to his knees. A wild cry burst from his lips,

when from the shore-end of the reef came loud and clear the lilt of the rune of his fate.

The next moment he was dragged down and swept from the reef into the sea. As the torn and mangled body disappeared from sight, it was amid a seething crowd of leaping and struggling seals, their eyes wild with affright and fury, their fangs red with human gore.

And Gloom Achanna, turning upon the reef, moved swiftly inland, playing low on his feadan as he went.





THE SAD QUEEN

"There was darkness over Eiré: they adored things of Faerie."

The Fiacc Hymn.

TWO men lay bound in the stone fold behind the great wall of Dun Scaith in the Isle of Mist.

One was Ulric the Skald; the other was Connla the Harper. Only they two lived when the galleys went down in the Minch, and the Gael and the Gall sank in the reddened waves.

For a long hour they were swung on the waves and on the same spar—the mast of the *Death-Raven*, which Svén

of the Long Hair had sailed in from the north isles, with a score galleys of a score men in each. Farcha the Silent had met him with two score galleys of ten men in each.

They had fought since the sun was in the south till it hung above the west. Then there were only the *Death-Raven* and the *Foam-Sweeper*. Ulric sat by Svén and sang the death-song and the song of the swords ; Connla sat by Farcha and sang the high song of victory.

When the galleys met through the bloody tangle in the seas, where spears rose and fell like boughs and branches of a wood in storm, and where men's hair clung black and limp past wild eyes and faces red with blood, Svén leaped into the *Foam-Sweeper*, and clove the head from a spearman who thrust at him, so that it fell into the sea, and the headless man shook with a palsy and waveringly mowed an idle spear.

But in that doing he staggered, and Farcha thrust his spear through him. The spear fixed Svén to the mast. Then an arrow from the sea struck him across the eyes, and he saw no more ; and when the *Foam-Sweeper* sank and dragged the *Death-Raven* with it, the two kings met : but Farcha was now like a heavy fish swung this way and that, and Svén thought the body was the body of Gunhild whom he loved, and strove to kiss it, but could not because of the spear and seven arrows which nailed him to the mast.

When the moon rose, the waters were in a white calm. Mid-sea, a great shadow passed northward : the travelling myriad of the herring-host.

When Ulric the Skald sank from the mast, Connla the

Harper held him by the hair, and gave him breath, so that he lived.

Thus when two spears drifted near, neither snatched at them. Later, Connla spoke. "One pulls me by the feet," he said; "it is one of your dead men who is drowning me." But at that Ulric drew a long breath, and strengthened his heart: then, seizing one of the spears, he thrust it downward, and struck the dead man whose hair tangled the feet of Connla, so that the dead man sank.

When they heard cries, they thought the galleys had come again, or others of Svén's host, or of Farcha's: but when they were dragged out of the sea, and lay staring at the stars, they knew no more, for sounds swam into their ears, and mist came into their eyes, and it was as though they sank through the boat, and through the sea, and through the infinite blank void below the sea, and were as two feathers there, blown idly under dim stars.

When they woke it was day, and a woman stood looking darkly at them.

She was tall, and of great strength; taller than Connla, stronger than Ulric. Long black hair fell upon her shoulders, which, with her breast and thighs, were covered with pale bronze. A red and green cloak was over the right shoulder, and was held by a great brooch of gold. A yellow torque of gold was round her neck. A three-pointed torque of gold was on her head. Her legs were swathed with deerskin thongs, and her feet were in coverings of cowskin stained red.

Her face was pale as wax, and of a strange and terrible beauty. They could not look long in her eyes, which were black as darkness, with a red flame wandering in it. Her

lips were curled delicately, and were like thin sudden lines of blood in the whiteness of her face.

"I am Scathach," she said, when she had looked long at them. Each knew that name, and the heart of each was like a bird before the slinger. If they were with Scathach,[1] the queen of the warrior-women of the Isle of Mist, it would have been better to die in water. The grey stones of Dun Scaith were russet with old blood of slain captives.

"I am Scathach," she said. "Do I look upon Svén of Lochlann and Farcha of the Middle Isles?"

"I am Ulric the Skald," answered the Northman.

"I am Connla the Harper," answered the Gael.

"You die to-night," and with that Scathach stood silent again, and looked darkly upon them for a long while.

At noon a woman brought them milk and roasted elk meat. She was fair to see, though a scar ran across her face. They sent word by her to Scathach with a prayer for life; they would be helots, and put birth upon women. For they knew the wont. But the woman returned with the same word.

"It is because she loved Cuchullin," the woman said, "and he was a poet, and sang songs, and made music as you do. He was fairer than you, man with the yellow hair, man with the long, dark hair; and you have put memories into the mind of Scathach. But she will listen to you harping and singing before you die."

[1] Scathach (pronounced *Ska'ah*, or *Skiah*), the name of the island of Skye, is by some said to be derived from the famous Amazonian queen who lived there, and taught Cuchullin the arts of war.

When the darkness came, and the dew fell, Ulric spoke to Connla. "The horse Rimemane is moving among the stars, for the foam is falling from his mouth."

Connla felt the falling of the dew.

"It was thus on the night I loved," he said below his breath.

Ulric could not see Connla's face because of the shadows. But he heard low sobs, and knew that Connla's face was wet with tears. "I too loved," he said; "I have had many women for my love."

"There is but one love," answered Connla in a low voice; "it is of that I am thinking and have remembrance."

"Of that I do not know," said Ulric. "I loved one woman well so long as she was young and fair. But one day a king's son desired her, and I came upon them in a wood on a cliff by the sea. I put my arms about her and leaped down the cliff. She was drowned. I paid no eric."

"There is no age upon the love of my love," said Connla softly; "she was more beautiful than the stars." And because of that great beauty he forgot death and his bonds.

When the warrior-women led them out to the shore, Scathach looked at them from where she sat by the great fire that blazed upon the sands.

She had been told that which they said one to the other.

"Sing the song of your love," she said to Ulric.

"What heed have I of any woman in the hour of my death?" he answered sullenly.

"Sing the song of your love," she said to Connla.

Connla looked at her, and at the great fire round which the fierce-eyed woman stood and looked at him, and at the still, breathless stars. The dew fell upon him.

Then he sang :

Is it time to let the hour rise and go forth, as a hound loosed from the battle-cars ?
Is it time to let the hour go forth, as the White Hound with the eyes of flame ?
For if it be not time, I would have this hour that is left to me under the stars,
Wherein I may dream my dream again, and at the last whisper one name.

It is the name of one who was more fair than youth to the old, than life to the young ;
She was more fair than the first love of Angus the Beautiful, and though I were blind
And deaf for a hundred ages I would see her, more fair than any poet has sung,
And hear her voice like mounted songs crying on the wind.

There was silence. Scathach sat with her face between her hands staring into the flame.

She did not lift her face when she spoke.

"Take Ulric the Skald," she said at last, but with eyes that stared still into the flame, "and give him to what woman wants him, for he knows nothing of love. If no woman wants him, put a spear through his heart so that he dies easily.

"But take Connla the Harper, because he has known all things, knowing that one thing, and has no more to know, and is beyond us, and lay him upon the sand with his face to the stars and put red brands of fire upon his naked breast, till his heart bursts and he dies."

HE LAY ON THE MOONLIT SAND

M H LAWRENCE

So Connla the Harper died in silence, where he lay on the moonlit sand, with red embers and flaming brands on his naked breast, and his face white and still as the stars that shone upon him.

AHÈZ THE PALE

THE moon sent her lances through the forest of Broceliande, among giant thickets of oak and beech. Under their boles the fire-flies trailed green fires. At long intervals a nightjar intermittently churred his passionate note to his mate, she swaying silent on a near branch. But the cry of the nightjar, the faint rustle of a wolf's foot among the acorn-garths, or of a doe uneasy amid the fern, the innumerable whisper of the green, leafy world—what were these but breaths of sound upon the sea of silence?

The nightingales had been still for a moon-quarter or more. For three farings of sun and moon the wind had scarcely reached Broceliande from the sea, or had reached it only to lapse where the fronds of the bracken were

BROCELIANDE

M.H.Lawrence.

motionless as the pines. Through the long days sullen thunders had prevailed. Sometimes their hollow booming came inland, and the sea moaned among oak-glades round whose roots no wave had ever lapped, whose green lips had never felt the foam-salt which in tempests whitens leagues of the mainland. Sometimes their prolonged reverberations came out of the south, and the void echoes of the Black Mountain travelled the green way of the oak summits beyond where the dunes fringe the extreme of the forest. But north or south, east or west, the thunders had not lapsed for days. Ubiquitous, they were a perpetual menace: yet though lightnings flashed continually along their livid flanks, these scimitars and dreadful spears were not let loose. Save by night, when the obscure dome unveiled, there was no cessation of that hollow minatory voice, a sullen monotone: the skiey fires darted and flickered their adder-tongue, but flamed no solitary oak into a sudden blaze, blasted no homestead, charred no fugitive life.

In the profound silence of this night, a long wailing chant ascended from the shadow of the forest.

After the first interval, a figure stirred stealthily amid the fern, in a glade near the westward margin of Broceliande, and moved swiftly to where the chant rose and fell, a thin, solitary cadence in that remote and consecrate region.

For in those days the forest of Broceliande was the holy of holies of the druids, who, within its solitudes, maintained their most secret rites and mysteries. Beyond the reach of their spells, not only the wolf and the bear, but the korrigan and the nain, the pool-sprite and the swamp-demon, the were-wolf and the soulless ghoul that

was like a woman, made the greenglooms a terror by day—a living death by night.

It was no druid, however, who tracked furtively the chanting voice, for the moonlight glistered on an iron breastplate and on a plumed and strangely-shaped bronze helmet. The man who thus dared secret death made no effort to escape into the recesses of the forest. Stealthily he drew closer to where the priest of Teutatês sang. When, at last, he was so near the fane, a single tall stone, that he was within a javelin-flight of the solitary white-robed chanter, he crouched, and waited.

The priest was a youth, and fair. As, in his slow, circling walk, he came nigh the spot where the interloper lay amid the fern, he stopped and stared dreamily at the moon, which swung goldenly in the green dusk between two lofty oaks. In his eyes there was a light that was not lit there by Teutatês. He smiled and drew farther into the wood, so that he could look at the yellow globe as a fair face set far above him.

There was silence now. The druid had ceased his chant, had forgotten his god. But the gods never slumber, nor do they forgive. The youth moved a step or two forward into a thick garth of fern. Slowly he raised his arms.

"To thee, O Goddess, I pray!" he cried softly. "To thee I pray! Grant me that which is the sweetest and surest thing in the world!"

He stared upward, his lips parted, his eyes shining.

"She loves me," he murmured again; "she loves me, O Goddess! Grant me that which is the sweetest and surest thing in the world!"

Astorêt must have heard the prayer, or did Teutatês frown upon her and have his own dark will? For, even as Arân the Druid spoke, a sword sprang from the gloom and passed through his back and into his heart and out beyond his breast, so that he died in that moment and soundlessly, save for the bubbling of a red foam upon his lips.

Swiftly the slayer dragged the body a score of yards deeper into the wood. Then, with famished haste, he denuded the druid, and, having taken off his own raiment and armour, put it upon the silent one, in exchange for the white priestly garment wherewith he had already clothed himself.

Of his weapons he kept none save a long, broad-bladed dagger, which he secured to the belt beneath the robe he now wore. But first with it he slashed the face of the dead man, so that none might know him.

"Lie there," he muttered with savage irony; "lie there, Jud Mael! At dawn the druids will come, and will find thee here, and will throw thy sacrilegious body on the altar-flame, as a peace-offering to Teutatês. For now *I* am Arân the Druid, who has departed no man knows where."

He turned at that, and passed swiftly into the forest, moving eastward.

He walked till dawn. Because of the smile in his eyes, he saw neither korrigan nor ghoul: because of the triumph in his heart he feared neither the tusk of the wild boar nor the fang of the wolf. Once, at sunrise, he laughed. That was because, from the summit of a granite scaur, he saw a dark column of smoke rising from the Circle of Stones where he had slain Arân the Druid.

"So that is the end of Jud Mael," he muttered; "and now . . . Ahèz may grind her teeth that she has missed the killing of her own prey, though her heart will leap because of that slaying and burning there in the forest."

Again, before he left that place, he muttered; and with clenched fist thrust his arm menacingly against that vague west wherein his death slipped stealthily after him from tree to tree. By noon he was within three miles of the Altar of Teutatês, for all that he had walked a score since midnight. He had wandered in a circle, but knew it not; for he was in a dream. When he came to note the sun it was high overhead. Later he slept. It was a sweet sleep that he had, amid a garth of bracken beset with brambles. All through his dream he heard the deep execration of Ahèz, daughter of Môrgwyn, the lord of Gwenêd: the low moaning of the dead man, Arân the Druid: and the sound of his own laughter.

He woke suddenly at the sun-down howl of a wolf. For a moment the sweat broke out upon his white face. It was not because of the howl of the wandering beast, but because his fear translated that savage sound into the cry of Ahèz. A glance at his white robe reassured him. He smiled. What was Arân now? The druids, at the two great festivals of the year, spoke of the strange faring of the soul. It came, they said, as a flying bird: it slipped away, according as were a man's deeds, as a bird, as a wolf, as a snake, or as a toad. His skin grew cold for a moment as he thought he might meet Arân in some such guise: would the dead man recognise him?

He had the instinct of the wanderer against sleeping

twice in the same place. Moreover, hunger now began to torment him. He crept slowly from his lair, and wandered this way and that in search of wild fruits and palatable herbs. Suddenly his gaze was arrested by a glint of flame. Sinking to the ground, he watched eagerly ; fearful lest what he had seen was the torch of a pursuer. In a brief while, however, he discerned that the light was that of a fire.

With tread as stealthy as that of a wolf near a fold he stole out of the wood, and from whin to whin till he was close upon the fire. Beside it sat an old man. Jud Mael looked long at the woodlander. His instinct was to kill him, for the sake of the roasted hedgehog which the old man was about to devour : but the risk was too great, for even if the woodlander were unknown to the druids his dead body might afford a fatal clue. So, at the last, he decided to speak.

So quietly did he draw near that he was at the old man's side unheard.

The peasant stumbled to his feet, startled : but when he saw the white robe of a druid he looked reassured, and made an obeisance.

" What do you do here, in the sacred wood, you who are clad in skins ? "

" I am not within the precincts, holy one. This glade is open ground. Surely you know it, who are Arân the Chanter."

Jud Mael started. A hunted look came into his wolfish eyes. He knew there was no resemblance between Arân and himself. How then did this old man take him for the druid whom he had slain ?

"How know you that I am Arân the Druid, old man?"

"Am I wrong, holy one? I took you to be Arân, for I heard that he had wandered in the forest, and had been seen of no man since yester moonrise."

"Even so; I am Arân. And why are you here?"

"I was told to wait on the outskirts of the wood, and to light a great fire, so that the flame of it should be seen of the wanderer. But as darkness was not yet come, and I was weak with hunger and had slain this beast, I made a small fire that I might eat."

"I too am hungered. I have tasted no food for a night and a day."

"Eat, then, holy one."

"But you?"

"Oh, I can find roots beneath these oaks. It is not fit that I should eat when Arân the Druid is weary with hunger. Eat!"

Jud Mael ate. As he devoured the white sweet meat his courage rose. By the time he had finished, the woodlander brought him some ground-berries wherewith to slake his thirst.

"Tell me, old man," Jud Mael said at last, having placed himself so that he could see any white-robe coming out of the darkness from the forest: "tell me what was said concerning me."

"Nought that I know of, save that you had wandered."

"And thou hast heard nought else to-day?"

"Surely. All who dwell by the wood have heard of the death of one who ventured into the holy precincts. He was a warrior. He died with blood. The druids

burned his accursed body at sunrise. Some say that he was slain by Arân—and, as it is an evil thing for a druid to take life, that he, you, O holy one, went into the deep forest to do penance."

"Did you hear the man's name?"

"Yes. It was Jud Mael."

"How was that known?"

"There was a sword upon him that was the sword given to the lord Jud Mael by Môrgwyn the King, because of what he did in some great battle—I know not what, nor what battle. There was a rune carved on it. Moreover, his helmet had the dragon of the Lords of Mael."

"I do not know the man. What of him?"

"It is not for me to speak."

"Speak, man. I command you."

"They say he was a fugitive."

"A fugitive? . . . from the King?"

"No."

"From whom, then?"

"From the King's sister, the lady Ahèz."

"The lady Ahèz?"

"Yes: Ahèz the Pale they call her, because she is so cream-white and fair."

"Why should Jud Mael fly from her?"

"They say he did her a great wrong."

"What wrong?"

"How do I know, holy one? I can but repeat idle gossip."

"Tell me what you have heard."

"Idle tongues have it that Jud Mael promised marriage

to Ahèz the Pale: but that when she bade him fulfil his vows, as she was with child to him, he laughed and said he could wed no woman, not even the King's sister, because that in his own place beyond the Black Mountains he had already a wife and children."

"What else did you hear?"

"Nothing, holy one."

"Did not Ahèz the Pale speak to the King?"

"They say she did, but who knows?"

"What else do they say about that, they who say she did?"

"That King Môrgwyn let his riding-whip fall across her shoulder, and bade her begone and not enter his presence again till she rode into the castle-wynd either with Jud Mael by her side as her wedded lord or with Jud Mael's head as the price of her honour."

"Well——?"

"That is all."

"Have you not heard whither Jud Mael fled?"

"No."

"Nor if Ahèz the Pale had been seen, on that hopeless quest of hers?"

"No."

"Old man, wouldst thou earn some gold?"

"Gladly, holy one."

"Then go at dawn—nay, go at once, for now that I am found there is no need for you to wait here—and seek out the lady Ahèz. Tell her what you know concerning that which happened in this forest. Tell her that you have spoken with Arân the Druid, and that it was he who slew Jud Mael, and that he knew the man—so that she

may know for a surety that he who wronged her is no longer among the living."

There was no response from the woodlander. Jud Mael leaned forward and looked closely at him. He saw that the old man's eyes were intently staring.

"What is it, old man; what do you see, that you stare like that?"

"Yonder . . . in the oak-glade yonder . . . on a white horse . . . yes, yes, it is Ahèz the Pale . . ."

With a stifled cry the druid sprang to his feet.

Yes, the woodlander was right. A woman, with long yellow hair, rode on a great white war-horse. She was chanting low to herself, with her eyes turned upon the moon. She had not yet seen those who had descried her.

With the silent swiftness of a beast of prey he slid back behind a mass of gorse, then glided from whin to whin till he was under the oaks again.

The old man stood, with gaping mouth and rapt eyes, as the night-rider drew nigh.

Ah, she was fair indeed, he thought: just like moonlight she was, fair and white and wonderful.

As the white war-horse trampled the bracken the words Ahèz chanted became audible.

But this was in the old, old, far-off days,
But this was in the old, old, far-off days.

Guenn took up his sword, and she felt its shining blade,
And she laughed and vowed it fitted ill for the handling of a maid.

He looked at her, and darkly smiled, and said she was a queen:
For she could swing the white sword high and love its dazzling sheen.

They rode beneath the ancient boughs, and as they rode she sang,
But at the last both silent were: only the horse-hoofs rang.

She lifted up the great white sword and swung it 'neath his head—
"Ah, you may smile, my lord, now you may smile," she said.

For this was in the old, old, far-off days,
For this was in the old, old, far-off days.

Suddenly Ahèz reined in the great white stallion she rode. She had caught sight of the woodlander. At that moment she saw a white-robed figure glide into the darkness of the forest.

"Tell me, forester," she asked—and the old woodlander wondered in his heart whether the beauty of her face excelled that of her voice—"tell me if the lord Jud Mael passed this way."

"The lord Jud Mael is dead, great lady. He was slain overnight. Only this moment there was one with me here who slew him—yea, and knew him to be Jud Mael."

"And what will the name of that man be, and where may I find him?"

"He is called Arân the Chanter. He is a druid. He may be found at the Sacred Castle. But this moment he went yonder, to the eastward."

"Then I will seek Arân the Chanter," she said; and, so saying, Ahèz the Pale rode onward in the moonlight.

It was only then that the woodlander noticed she carried a white babe in the fold of her left arm. He knelt, and prayed to his gods.

Once more, as she rode, she caught sight of a white-robed figure flitting rapidly before her.

"Ah, Arân the Chanter," she murmured, "I would fain have word of you!"

At the first mile she passed the Well of Death—a deep

fount in the forest where the nains were wont to meet. And as she rode she heard the nains chanting.

She had the old ancient wisdom. She knew the wood-speech. And the song the nains sang was of blood, and of the red footsteps in the wood.

And when Ahèz passed the Well a nain appeared. She was like a woman, but was all of green flame. She sang :

Ana this was in the old, old, far-off days,
And this was in the old, old, far-off days.

Whereat Ahèz the fearless chanted back :

O Nain, what was in the old, old, far-off days?

And the nain laughed, and sang :

O Blind One, who followest a dead man that is alive?

And having chanted this she vanished. But Ahèz knew what the nain meant, and the blood-flame rose in her.

So she followed a dead man who was alive! Who could this be but Jud Mael? Ah, the white-robed druid!

She took a long dagger from her girdle, and pricked the flank of the white stallion till the blood trickled red.

As the steed sprang onward through the moonshine, the nains chanted. She heard their wild mocking laughter, and wondered if to Arân, the flying druid, that was Jud Mael, the fugitive from death, their voices rang with wild terror.

Once, from an oak-glade, she saw him look back over his shoulder.

The eyes of the gods were in the Wood of Broceliande

that night. Whether Jud Mael turned to the right or to the left, or fled onward with stumbling feet, seeking for dark places and briery thickets and the conduits of damp caverns, the moonbeams tracked him like hounds.

While still afar off, Ahèz the Pale saw this thing, and she smiled.

Once he stopped for a few panting moments. He heard her chanting :

For this was in the old, old, far-off days,
For this was in the old, old, far-off days.

Then, blind with fear, he stumbled on.

For a brief while thereafter he had hope. The sound of the following hoofs grew fainter. Thrice, on furtively looking back, he could discern no white rider, no white horse. Once, in a rearward glade, he saw two leverets playing in the moonshine. He drew a long breath. It was well, he thought ; for he had now a wide glade to cross, a vast glade horribly white with the moonflood, with but a single isle of refuge midway, a solitary lightning-blasted oak.

Jud Mael hesitated to traverse this terrifying void, yet dared not skirt it lest the woman on the white horse should cut him off. At last he fell on his hands and knees, and slowly crawled through the dewy fern.

He had gone half-way, when suddenly his heart leaped against his throat.

A great white stallion was trampling down the bracken at the edge of the glade. A woman, with long moonlit hair, rode it ; and as she rode in silence he heard the crying of a child.

With gasping haste he crawled close to the oak. There, among its cavernous roots, he hoped to escape unseen.

Ahèz the Pale rode straight for the solitary tree. When the great stallion trampled among the far-spreading roots, she drew rein.

"Come forth, Jud Mael," she cried.

Jud Mael shivered. At last the man within him wrestled with the coward, and he rose to his feet, and stepped out into the moonlight.

"Art thou Arân the Druid, O thou who wearest a white robe, or art thou Jud Mael?"

"I am Jud Mael, O Ahèz whom I have loved."

"And it was thou who slew the priest?"

"He came to his death."

"As thou to thine. But first, lest I slay thee where thou standest, take this child that is your child. He is no child of mine, though I bore him. I am of the royal line, that never bore a coward, and what could this child be but a coward and a traitor? The boy must die."

"I cannot slay the little one, Ahèz."

"I have not tracked thee down to bandy words. Take thou the child."

Slowly Jud Mael advanced. On his white face the sweat glittered like dew.

He put out his arms, and enfolded the child. Then, with steadfast eyes, he looked up at Ahèz.

She stared at him unflinchingly, but made no sign.

"Ahèz!"

"Hast thou not heard me, dog?"

Jud Mael flushed a deep red.

"Beware, woman! After all, it is but a woman you are, and you are alone here, and I can slay you as easily as I could a fawn of the forest."

"Thou liest."

The man looked at her defiantly; then, sullenly, his eyes fell.

"What wouldst thou, Ahèz?"

"Slay this child."

With a sudden savage gesture the man took the broad knife from the belt that was below his white robe. He hesitated a moment, then abruptly plunged the iron blade into the child's breast. There was a long gasping sound, a clinching of little fingers, a spasmodic twitching of little hands and feet. A thin jet of blood spurted up in the face of Jud Mael. He stood, shaking, trembling like a leaf.

"Why hast thou made me do this thing, Ahèz?"

"Thou wert a liar, and betrayed me. Thinkest thou I shall bear the seed of a traitor?"

"But to what end?"

"To what end? . . . That thy soul may pass into some evil thing, and die and utterly perish. For now thou hast slain thine own blood. Bring me the child. Alive, it was thine; slain, it is mine."

Jud Mael slowly drew near. He lifted the inert small body. Ahèz leaned sideways as though to take it in her arms. As she gripped the child with her left hand, she raised her right arm. The next moment a dagger flashed in the moonlight, and with a scraping, gurgling sound, sank in between the shoulders of Jud Mael.

The man staggered, reeled, and would have fallen but for the heaving flank of the stallion.

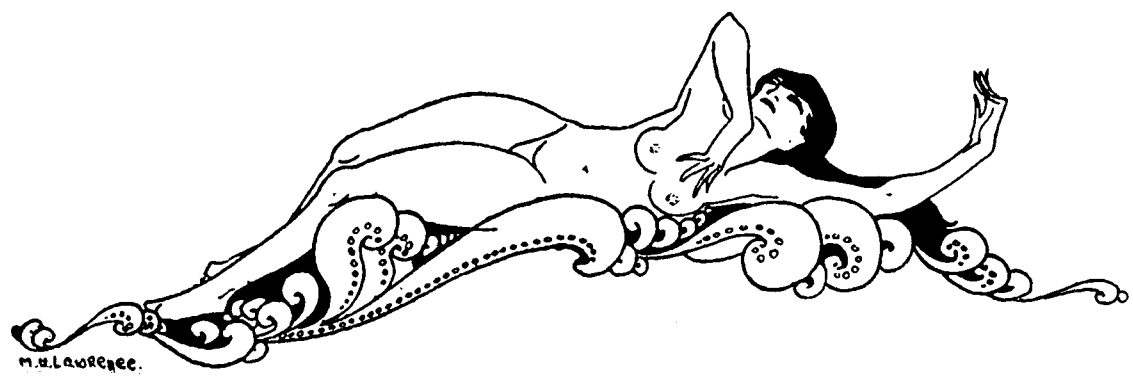
Ahèz leaned back, and with a wrench pulled away the dagger. Then, before the stricken man would recover, she thrust the blade into his neck.

Jud Mael gave a hoarse cry. As he fell, he slashed at the thigh of Ahèz, but the weapon missed and made a deep cut in the belly of the stallion. Snorting and rearing, the great beast swung round and trampled upon the fallen man, neighing savagely the while.

When he lay quite still, Ahèz dismounted. She took the body of the child and piled loose stones above it, to keep it sacred against wild beasts and birds of prey.

Thereafter, with Jud's knife, she severed the man's head, and by its long black hair slung it to the tangled mane of the stallion.

Then she mounted, and rode slowly back by the way she had come.



FARA-GHAOL

"The sea's never so full that it can't drown sorrow."

Gaelic saying.

"'Heart or rock!' cried the sea to the land:
'Fara-ghaol (false love)!' cried the land to the sea."

Fragment of a Gaelic "iorram."

"Gur truagh nach mi 's mo leanu a bha
A muigh fo sgath nan geug O!"

"Would that I and my baby were
Under the shade of the tree, O!"

A Uist lullaby.

AT a running water, that comes out at a place called Stràth-na-mara, near the sea-gates of Loch Suibhne, there is a pool called the Pool of the Changeling. None ever goes that way for choice, for it is not only the crying of the curlew that is heard there, or the querulous wailing lapwing.

It was here that one night, in a September of many storms, a woman stood staring at sea. The screaming sea-mews wheeled and sank and circled overhead, and the solanders rose with heavy wing and hoarse cries, and the black scarts screeched to the startled guillemots or to the foam-white terns blown before the wind like froth. The

woman looked neither at the seafowl nor at the burning glens of scarlet flame which stretched dishevelled among the ruined lands of the sunset.

Between the black flurries of the wind, striking the sea like flails, came momentary pauses or long silences. In one of these the woman raised her arms, she the while unheeding the cold tide-wash about her feet, where she stood insecurely on the wet, slippery tangle.

Seven years ago this woman had taken the one child she had, that she did not believe to be her own, but a changeling, and had put it on the shore at the extreme edge of the tide-reach, and there had left it for the space of an hour. When she came back, the child she had left with a numbness on its face and with the curse of dumbness, was laughing wild, and when she came near, it put out its arms and gave the cry of the young of birds. She lifted the *leanav* in her arms and stared into its eyes, but there was no longer the weary blankness, and the little one yearned with the petulant laughing and idle whimpering of the children of other mothers. And that mother there gave a cry of joy, and with a singing heart went home.

It was the seventh year after that finding by the sea, that one day, when a cold wind was blowing from the west, the child Morag came in by the peat-fire, where her mother was boiling the porridge, and looked at her without speaking. The mother turned at that, and looked at Morag. Her heart sank like a pool-lily at shadow when she saw that Morag had woven a wreath of brown tangled seaweed into her hair. But that was nothing to the bite in her breast when the girl began singing a song that had not a word in it she had ever heard on her own or other lips, but

was wild as the sound of the tide calling in dark nights of cloud and wind, or as the sudden coming of waves over a quiet sea in the silence of the black hours of sleep.

"What is it, Morag-mo-rùn?" she asked, her voice like a reed in the wind.

"It's time," says Morag, with a change in her eyes, and her face smiling with a gleam on it.

"Time for what, Morag?"

"For me to be going back to the place I came from."

"And where will that be?"

"Where would it be but to the place you took me out of, and called across?"

The mother gave a cry and a sob. "Sure now, Morag-a-ghràidh, you will be my own lass and no other?"

"Whist, woman," answered the girl; "don't you hear the laughing in the burn, and the hoarse voice out in the sea?"

"That I do not, O Morag-mo-chree, and sure it's black sorrow to you and to me to be hearing that hoarse voice and that thin laughing."

"Well, sorrow or no sorrow, I'm off now, poor woman. And it's good-bye and a good-bye to you I'll be saying to you, poor woman. Sure it's a sorrow to me to leave you in grief, but if you'll go down to the edge of the water, at the place you took me from, where the runnin' water falls into the sea-pool, you'll be having there against your breast in no time the child of your own that I never was and never could be."

"And why that, and why that, O Morag, lennavan-mo?"

"Peace on your sorrow, woman, and good-bye to you now;" and with that the sea-changeling went laughing

MORAG OF THE SEA

M.H.Lawrence.

out at the door, singing a wave-song so wild and strange the mother's woe was turned to a fear that rose like chill water in her heart.

When she dared follow—and why she did not go at once she did not know—she saw at first no sight of Morag or any other on the lonely shore. In vain she called, with a great sorrowing cry. But as, later, she stood with her feet in the sea, she was silent of a sudden, and was still as a rock, with her ragged dress about her like draggled seaweed. She had heard a thin crying. It was the voice of a breast-child, and not of a grown lass like Morag.

When a grey heron toiled sullenly from a hollow among the rocks she went to the place. She was still now, with a frozen sorrow. She knew what she was going to find. But she did not guess till she lifted the little frail child she had left upon the shore seven years back, that the secret people of the sea or those who call across running water could have the hardness and coldness to give her again the unsmiling dumb thing she had mothered with so much bitterness of heart.

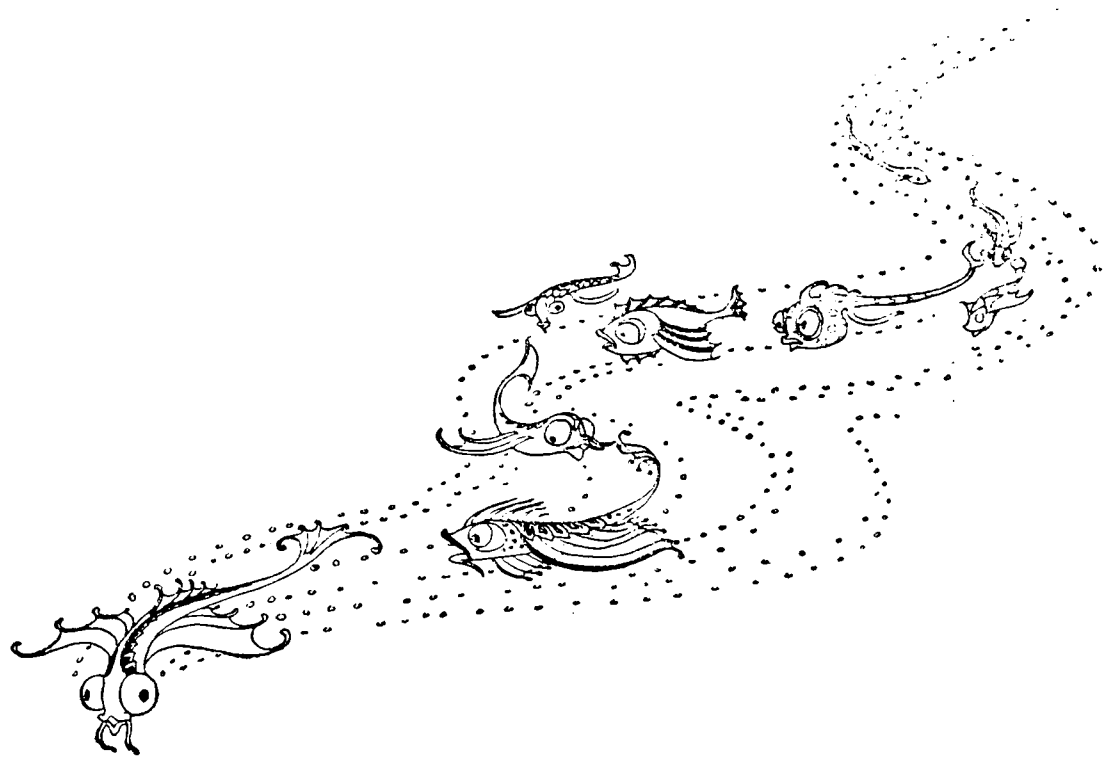
Morag she never saw again, nor did any other see her, except Padruig Macrae, the innocent, who on a New Year's eve, that was a Friday, said that as he was whistling to a seal down by the Pool at Stràth-na-mara he heard some one laughing at him ; and when he looked to see who it was he saw it was no other than Morag—and he had called to her, he said, and she called back to him, "Come away, Padruig dear," and then had swum off like a seal, crying the heavy tears of sorrow.

And as for the child she had found again on the place she had left her own silent breast-babe seven years back, it

never gave a cry or made any sound whatever, but stared with round, strange eyes only, and withered away, in three days, and was hidden by her in a sand-hole at the root of a stunted thorn that grew there.

At every going down of the sun thereafter, the mother of the changeling went to the edge of the sea, and stood among the wet tangle of the wrack, and put out her supplicating hands, and never spoke word nor uttered cry.

But on this night of September, while the gleaming seafowl were flying through the burning glens of scarlet flame in the wide purple wildness of the sky, with the wind falling and wailing and wailing and falling, the woman went over to the running water beyond the sea-pool, and put her skirt over her head and stepped into the pool, and, hooded thus and thus patient, waited till the tide came in.



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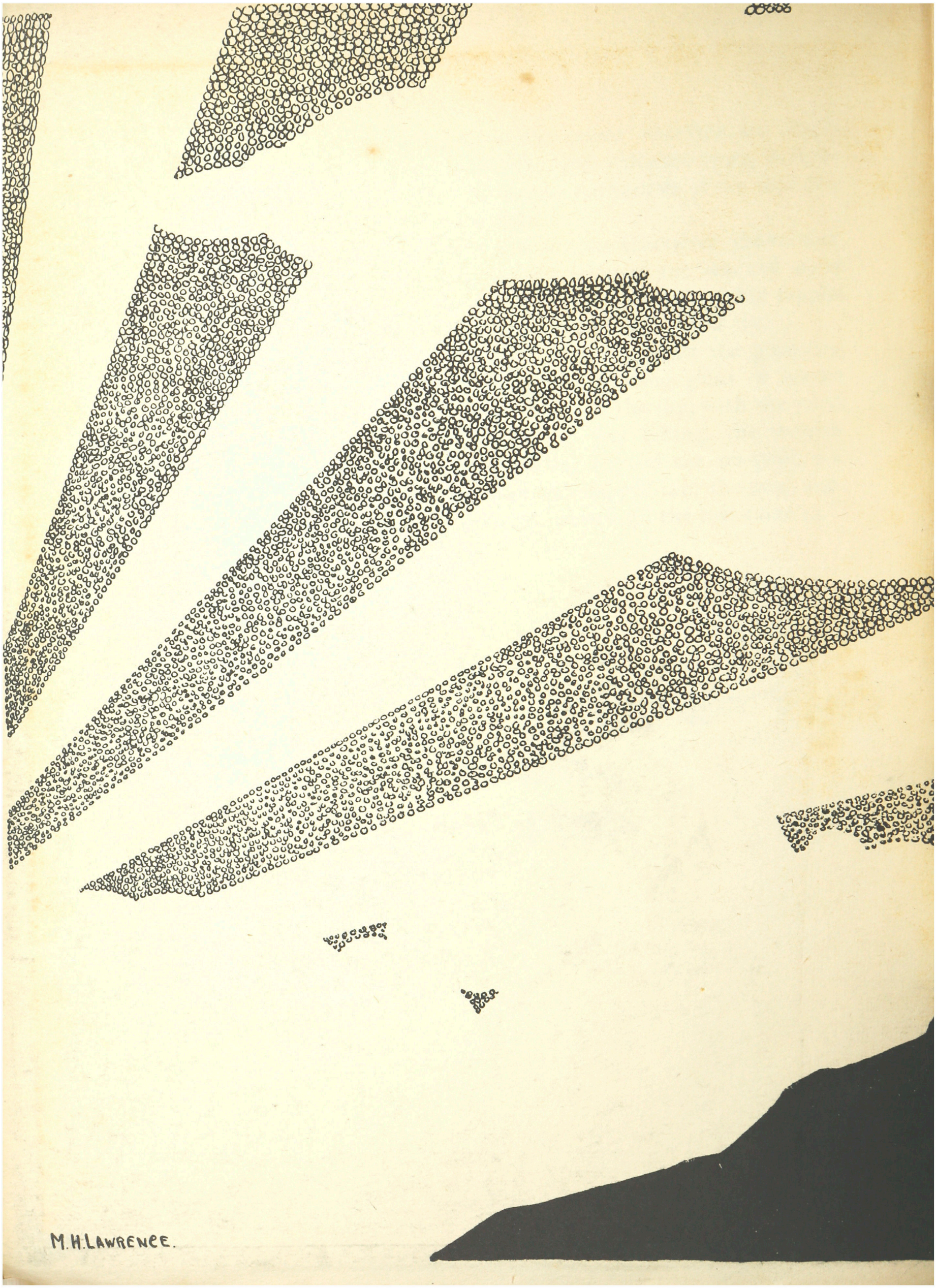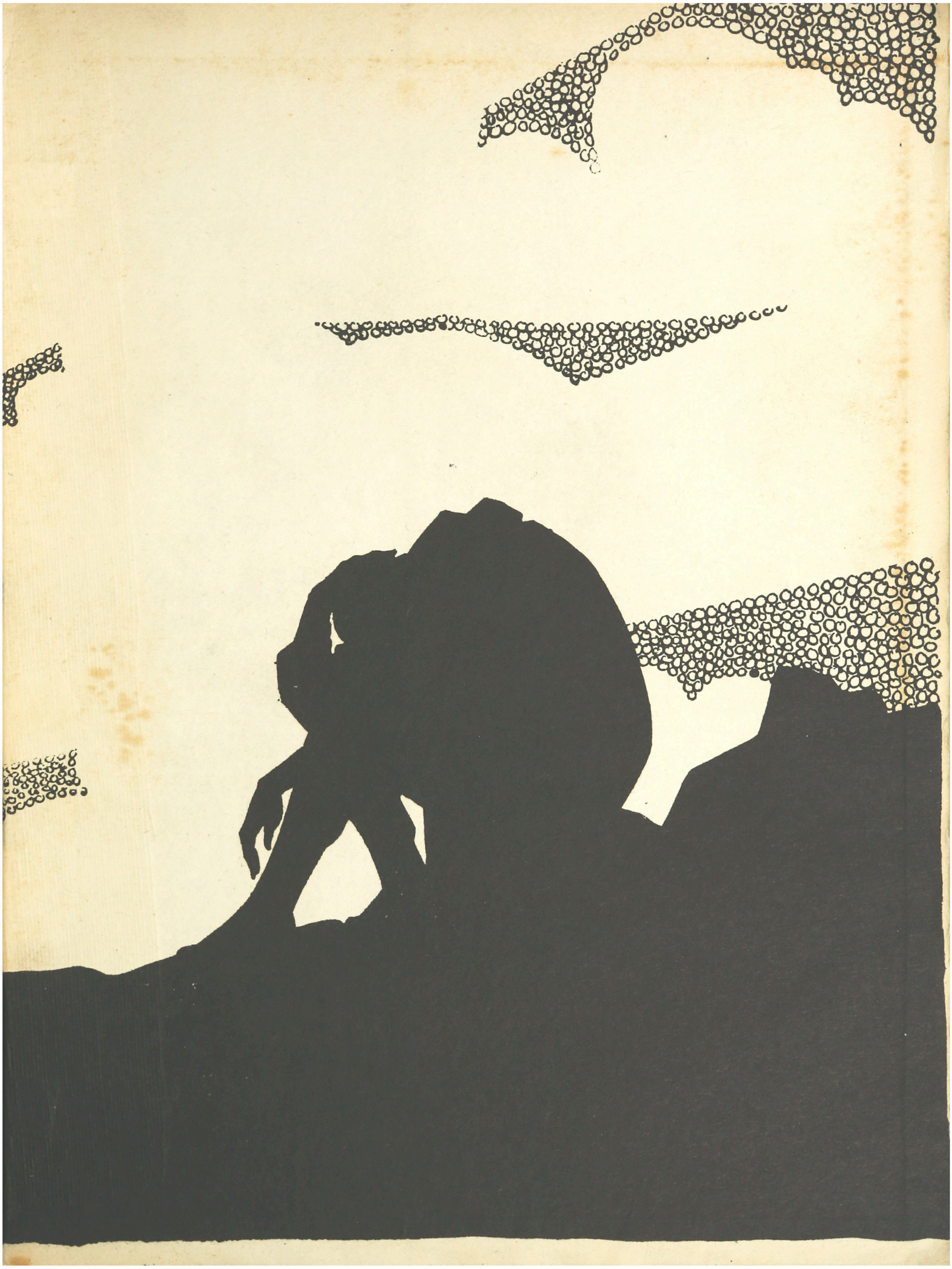
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