

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1948

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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The Merrow

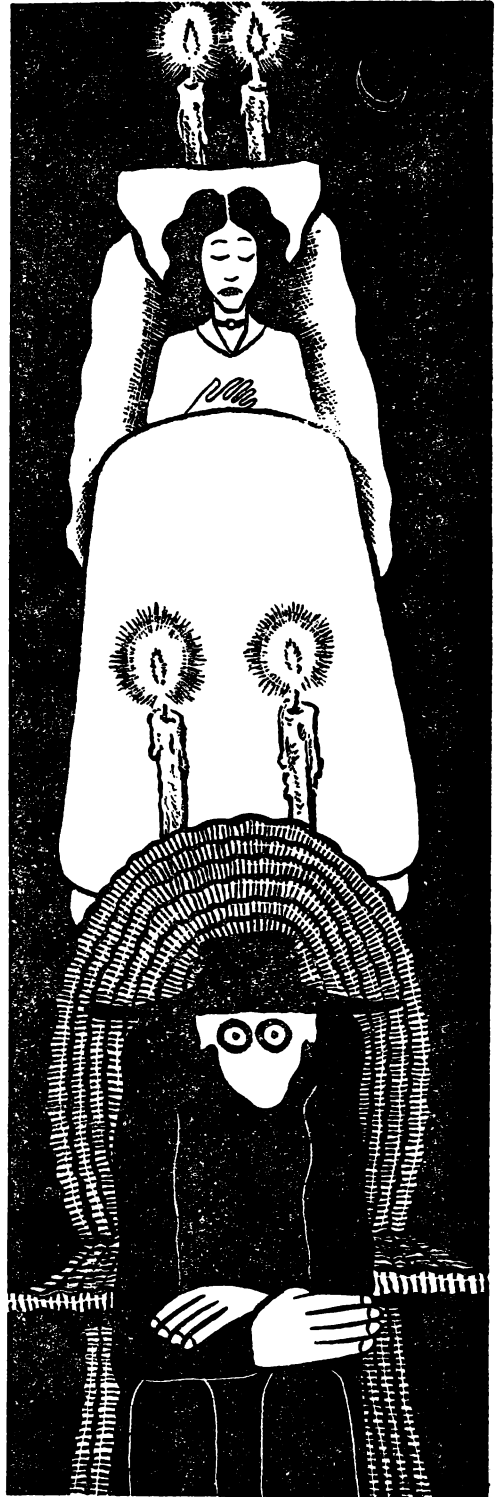
BY SEABURY QUINN

HE SAT in the big chair of plaited straw as still as a man in a painted portrait, and the deepening dusk grew heavier about him. Faint luminance from clouds lit by the moon behind them gave an air of unreality to the whole scene, something like twilight, something like the light before the dawn, yet neither, and across the turf-ringed flagstones of the terrace little rays of amber brightness crept like timid children venturing into the dark, then drawing back, affrighted at their own boldness. That would be from the candles. The tall white candles at her head and feet. Earlier there had been prayers and Scripture reading—"In the sight of the unwise they seem to die, but they are in peace"—but now there was just talk, the hushed, half-whispered talk reserved for such occasions.

"Wirra," came the lament of a tenant farmer as he drew his cap on at the door, "to think herself is dead, an' her so beautiful an' all," and his wife's sharp whispered rebuke as she slipped the shawl from her head to her shoulders: "Musha, man, do not be talkin'. 'Tis th' lovely angel she'll be makin', so she will!"

The day before they'd found her at the shore with all the fine high color gone from her face, and the quiet waves caressing her as tenderly as if they sought to rock her into deeper sleep. The seaside path was treacherous after dark, and more than one unwary walker had slipped to his death in the cove, but it was death by misadventure, and so a crowner's case, and not until the solemn men of law and the *Garde Siochana*—civil guard—had done with her did they release her to be buried in the churchyard.

His feelings puzzled him. He wondered why he did not cry, at least why he did not



*"In the sight of the unwise they seem to die
but they are in peace."*

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

feel crushed with grief. He didn't. The loss of a pet animal when he had been a lad had caused him sharper sorrow than the tragic taking of this woman who had been his wife less than a year.

A sudden pang of conscience stabbed him. Peer Gynt had fathered an imp with the Troll King's daughter by mere thought; could a vagrant, unexpressed wish—the passionate upflaring of desire—have brought Rosalys to the water—"Nonsense!" he spurned the thought from his mind. "Rubbish!" Such fancies were for the Irish, the mystically superstitious Irish who were either mad or childish, often both, but he was an American, and sane.

The susurrus of talk had come at last to a close, and the lamps that burned in dining room and hall had been extinguished. Now only the faint yellow light of candles remained in the house, and outside the moon glow and starshine. The lattice of a casement rattled softly and the vicar's step lipped on the flagstones. "Poor Stephen," the old man's hand pressed his shoulder affectionately. "I know, Stephen, lad. Words aren't much use at times like this, are they? I understand."

But he didn't. Nobody understood, least of all Stephen McKelvy, whose bride "lay by the wall" with corpse lights at her head and feet, and for whom life held no more meaning than a pied picture puzzle with half its pieces missing.

THERE had, for instance, been no valid reason for his coming to Eire in the first place. Nothing but a whim, a sort of childish curiosity, had drawn him over St. George's Channel to Dublin, and thence across the island to this little coastal village twenty miles north of the Shannon. True it was his ancestors had come from there, but Ireland itself meant scarcely more to him than a name on a map.

His grandfather's father had come from Kildillon during the great famine of '46, and like so many of his countrymen had prospered in the new world. A job as driver of a Broadway stage was followed by appointment to the police force, and when he'd done his honorable service in the Civil War he profited by the political good fortune of the returned soldier. Boss Tweed's

star had begun to rise and with it rose the star of Kevin McKelvy. From ward captain to alderman he moved, then to appointment as a police magistrate. At fifty-five he was the owner of two prosperous saloons and a fine livery stable, at sixty-five he yielded up the ghost and was laid in St. Patrick's churchyard, leaving a substantial fortune and a son who was already married and a father.

The son advanced the family fortunes, and when the motor car began to crowd the horse from the highways he was ready for the change. He left his son a fully equipped garage and the agency for one of the most popular makes of cars.

Then Stephen came, and into his lap dropped the whole accumulation of his forbear's labors. His great-grandfather had been forthright peasant stock and not ashamed of it, proud of his achievement in his new home, but holding an affectionate memory for the land of his origin. Ireland had been only a legend to his grandfather, and to his father even less than that. Somewhere along the line they had departed from the ancient faith, the Irish blood had been diluted by mixed marriages, and Stephen had no ties of faith, blood or affection for the Old Sod. When war came he was put in Motor Transport and served in a ear pool in England till V-J Day.

Then on sudden impulse he decided to go over to the land of his ancestors. The automotive business was all shot to hell at home, and he was at a loose end, more than comfortably supplied with funds, and in no hurry to get back to New York.

Was it a whim that brought him back, he sometimes wondered, or had it been the homing instinct, the instinct that brings back the wild geese to West Meath and Roscommon from halfway round the world?

He had pictured Ireland as a land of thriftless waste, a land oppressed by poverty in which only the lazy and unfortunate remained and from which those with ambition fled to other lands to remember it only with a sort of contemptuous affection.

After the austerities of wartime England he found it a land like that which Moses' spies viewed from the mountain top. A land which literally flowed milk and honey, for in the lush green pastures cattle stood shin-deep in grass and clover, and the

brown bees came home laden to capacity with nectar from the clover and the orchards.

At the Moruadh Inn at Kildillon were eggs and Irish bacon and thick steaks and mutton cutlets such as he had not seen since he left America, and cream—not powdered milk—to stir into his coffee, and golden butter for his fine white bread. The farms about the village were well kept as those of Dutchess County, and the white-walled, brown-thatched farmhouses substantial as any he had ever seen. Everywhere was peace, content and prosperity, and no one said "be gorra" or "be gob" or acted in the least like a stage Irishman.

On Sunday he attended morning prayer at the ugly little Anglican Church of St. Brandón, a square-built stone structure dating from the sixteenth century with pews of age-black oak and tombstones of long dead and gone parishioners in the aisles, and after service the vicar spoke to him with grave old-world courtesy and invited him to tea that evening.

Tea at a country vicarage—something right out of Jane Austin! This would be something to tell them about when he got back. Most likely it would be ghastly, with the old man maundering of politics, perhaps recalling the good days before disestablishment and hinting a donation would not be taken amiss.

THE vicarage was mellow as a piece of Ming porcelain or a carpet out of Hamadan in the blue twilight. Red-brick, ivy-covered, with tall trees about it and a lawn as smooth and fine-grained as green velvet it stood just beyond the little churchyard with its yew and hemlocks, and from its long windows amber light glowed welcome. Inside was a mellow atmosphere of heirlooms, ancestors and history. Candles in tall silver standards shed a warmth of apricot-hued light on mahogany polished to a satin finish, Georgian silver, rugs from Shiraz and the blurred blues and reds and purples of old china. Portraits in gilt frames blinked benignly from the walls, peat smoldered aromatically in the brass fire-grate, and over all there was an air of contentment and well being.

So much he saw at a glance, contrasting

the perfect setting with the shocking lack of taste he had encountered in most English homes, then he lost interest in the room, for Mr. de Barry introduced: "My daughter Rosalys, Mr. McKelvy."

He saw first the great mass of her hair, tawny as the leafage of a copper beech, which seemed more like a splash of vivid color in a Titian portrait than a woman's tresses, then the small nose with its slim patrician nostrils, the clear and steady zircon-green eyes, and the mouth and chin that bespoke both sensitiveness and courage. He thought her dinner dress was simple green, but he could not be sure, for he was bemused by the beauty of her calm, fine face, the wealth of tawny hair, the lyric grace of her long, lovely hands. She was not large or tall but she seemed so because of her superb carriage, and from the dim, wiped-over past memories of stories he had heard from his grandfather, stories of the ancient heroines of Ireland, of Queen Maeve of Connaught who had led a hundred thousand raiders over the uplands, and Eimer who had died for love of Cochulainn dead on the field of battle, of Eibhlin the high king's daughter, who had fled her father's castle to share exile with flame-haired Cuin O'Caian the charioteer.

There were oat *ferrels* and sandwiches of ham and cucumber and a fine white cake with pink icing to eat with the bland aromatic China tea, and a bottle of Jameson's Green Label, softer and less smoky than the Scottish brew but powerful as black magic, and fine cream sherry out of Malaga, but more intoxicating than the wine or whiskey was the talk—tales of ancient days when Gilles de Barrie came with Strongbow and his Normans in 1170, and of Shoneen of the same name who was with Napper Tandy on his ill-starred expedition and was sent back by the Germans out of Hamburg—may they find no quiet in the grave!—to be hanged by the English in Dublin town.

"But I thought that you were Protestants," McKelvy argued. "Surely—"

"Och, surely, now, you've heard tales from the Irishmen who make a business out of being Irish in America!" the vicar chuckled. "Not one of 'em would risk his precious hide to fight the *Sassenach*, and I'll wager none of 'em would tell you Nap-

per Tandy was a Protestant, and Emmet—rest his soul!—a Freemason to boot.”

The moon was round and bright as a new-minted coin when Stephen said good night and Mr. de Barry offered to “leave him a bit o’ the road.”

“You’re stopping at the inn, belike?” he asked as they climbed the stile that spanned the hedge between the vicarage garden and the church-yard.

“Yes. They call it the Moruadh. That means the Mermaid, I assume. There’s a picture on the sign that might have been a mermaid once, though it’s so faded now—”

“Not quite a mermaid,” the vicar paused to stuff an improbably black briar with impossibly black tobacco and struck a match against the ferrule of his blackthorn. “The mermaid is a harmless kind of creature, and gentle as a dolphin, but the moruadh, now, is something else again. The merrow, as it’s called in English, is sinister. It calls up storms to plague the fishing fleets, it draws the fishers down to the green depths. Sometimes it comes out on the shore, and woe betide the mortal who sees it. It’s beautiful with an inhuman beauty, but deadly in its comeliness, for it can draw a man’s soul through his lips with its kissing—there’s a legend that a merrow haunts the cove down by the sea-walk between here and the village. That’s where the inn gets its name—”

“Surely, sir,” McKelvy laughed, “you don’t believe such nonsense.” All at once he felt as if he were a grown-up humoring a child in some fantastic make-believe.

“I wouldn’t say that I believe it, no,” the vicar seemed more serious than the occasion warranted. “But we don’t dismiss all stories of that ilk as old wives’ tales. It’s hard to say just what one believes. In Ireland, you know, the other world’s almost as close to us as the next turning in the lane, and—the path *is* treacherous above the cove, that may account for it—more than one lad has passed that way at night and been picked up in the sea next morning, dry-drowned.”

“Dry-drowned?” McKelvy echoed questioningly.

“Aye. With lungs collapsed as if an air-pump had drawn all the breath from them, and not a spot of sea-water inside him.”

Once more McKelvy laughed, but this time there was something thin and tinny in

the sound. A cloud had swept across the bleached disc of the moon, a yellow cloud with tattered, frayed-out edges, and a strange eerie dusk crept across the landscape. The soft wind soughing through the gnarled boughs of the ancient apple trees seemed to have withdrawn itself and in its stead there was a cold hard dampness that seemed formlessly menacing.

MORNING came, a cool and lovely day with limpid wine-sweet air and sunlight glinting on wet trees and grass. He breakfasted luxuriously in the ordinary of the inn; a porringer of oatmeal with sugar in abundance and a jug of clotted cream, eggs fried golden-brown in rich, sweet butter, grilled kidneys and thick-sliced Irish bacon and a pewter mug of shandy-gaff—mixed ginger-beer and stout—that made him feel a little—just a very little—fuddled, but supremely contented with life.

Afterwards he set off down the ironed highroad, but soon turned off to the rolling path that skirted the cliffs by the sea. To left of him the ocean stretched clear to America, a vast and shimmering surface where the sun struck, and here and there a white and curling wave; green, shaggy meadows lay to his right, and in the distance peaty smoke rose from the cottages. The gray gulls wheeled above him, shirking with the sea’s immense melancholy, and presently she came toward him along the undulating footway.

She wore rough heather-tinted tweeds, a skirt and jacket that looked oddly mannish on a figure so divinely feminine, and a small brown felt hat pulled over her bright hair.

Two half-grown Aberdeen terriers were with her, and seemed riotously glad to see him, almost tearing the leash from her hand in the exuberance of their welcome. “Hullo,” she greeted, frankly pleased, and just as frankly surprised, at the meeting. “How are you?”

“Great,” he answered with enthusiasm, pulling at the puppies’ pointed ears. “Going my way?”

She seemed pondering the question. “Which way is that?”

“Whichever way you’re going,” he returned, and they both laughed, and won-

dered why they'd never laughed so joyously before.

Summer deepened and the pear and apple trees were gravid with their fruitage. The mornings had a golden smile, the noontides a sweet somnolence, the nights were moon-washed fantasies, starred overhead with a bright glittering web of asterisms and with the dim white constellations of the bow-flowers below.

Rosalys and Stephen had been on a picnic, seeking out a little spot they knew on the *slieve*—the round-topped heather-covered mountain—and now they lay upon the soft sweet grass and let the sun press on their closed eyelids. The luncheon basket had been emptied of its sandwiches, and beneath its folded napkin thrust the slender necks of emptied Rhine wine bottles. Youth and a clear conscience and the steep climb up the hill had given them keen appetites, and there was little left for bird and insect when they'd finished. The warm scent of the clover was about them, and the delicate odor of fern.

She locked her hands behind her neck and smiled up at the rowan tree that stretched its branches like a canopy above them, and a little sigh pushed past her lips.

"What gives?" asked Stephen, and she chuckled with delight at the Americanism.

"There's always something sad about all happiness, *acusbla*. Perhaps because we know it cannot last and so sigh for it, even while we have it."

"You've liked today?"

She shivered as with a sudden chill, then laughed. "I wish that it could be like this forever; that we could have today frozen into a little eternity."

He looked at her dazedly, like a man who sees a miracle. His pulses raced till he could hardly speak, but somehow he contrived it. "Why not make it last forever?" he asked huskily. "Rosalys, I—will you marry me?"

He had risen in his agitation, now she rose and faced him, her eyes fixed on him steadily. "You love me—truly love me—Stephen McKelvy?"

"With all my heart and soul—"

Her arms were suddenly about his neck, warm and tender, and her voice was full of gentleness and laughter. "*Avick*," she whispered. "*Acusbla, cuiste mo chroidhe!*"

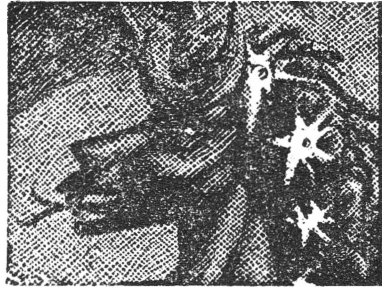
She spoke the soft Erse endearments as naturally as a mother speaks love-talk to her child. "My boy, my darling, blood of my heart!" and her face was like an angel's, so much of happiness and beauty there was in it. Then she turned her sweet cool lips up for his kiss.

"A YE, Stephen lad," the vicar asked when they told him, "you'll be taking her back to the States with you?"

"Why, yes, sir, that's my home—"

"Small blame to you, *avick*. Since history began, and before, Irish-women have gone with their men to exile or to high adventure, but there's one favor I'd be asking. Stay here, if business will permit, until I see my first grandchild. I'm just from Limerick and Dr. O'Boyle, and—" he smiled as though no shadow threatened him—"he tells me to be watching for the *coiste-bodhar* any night now."

"The *coiste-bodhar*?"



"Aye, lad. The Anglo-Irish call it coach-a-bower—the great black coach drawn by six headless black horses and driven by a headless postilion that comes to collect the souls of the dead. It's the heart, Stephen. It may keep ticking for a year or two; it may stop beating the next minute, and I wouldn't have the strength to come out to you."

"Why, of course," Stephen agreed. There was no urgent reason for his going back. The business was in competent hands, and it would be a year or two, or perhaps three, before the motor companies got into production again. "We'll take the Dower House and stay right here—" He nodded reassuringly to the old man, but more than ever he felt like a sane man set down in a world inhabited by amiable lunatics. The coach-a-

bower . . . headless horses, headless driver! Good Lord, next they'd be telling him the banshee had been heard outside the vicarage windows!

Liffery manor house had been burned in the fall of '21, but the little red-brick dower house was still intact, and there they set up housekeeping. The autumn had advanced and the wind made busy little whirls among the dust along the roads, and then forgot itself to go chasing after leaves. The chestnut trees shook down their fruits, and on the rowans small red berries bitter as the pangs of death shone jewel-bright. At night the candles burned with steady amber light or oil lamps filled the rooms with creamy brightness. By day they took long walks or went down to the town on shopping expeditions or to the "kinema." A few times they went to the races and lost more than they won, but since their bets were very modest they made small account of their losses. Life was sweet and pleasant as existence in *tir-na-hóige*, the Islands of the Blest, "where you can buy happiness for a penny," but gradually Stephen tired of it.

His short life had been filled with action—school, business, the army—and the easy tempo of the lazy days wore on his nerves as music heard too often may be first monotonous, then irritating, finally unbearable. He took to walking out alone at night, and when Rosalys called after him, "Be careful where you go, *acushla*, the moruadh may be waiting at the cove!" he muttered something very like a curse upon all crazy, superstitious Irish.

SPRING came gently, washing up the steep slopes of the hills in a green tide and breaking at their summits in a froth of blossoms. Pear and apple trees and plums swung their little white branches in the breeze, and through the land there sang so sweet a wind that you could almost see its perfume taking form. But the season brought no surcease of his mood to Stephen. More and more he longed for New York, for Fifth Avenue awash with life and color, for Central Park with its fresh greens as yet unblurred with dust, and the clatter of roller skates on the walks of the side streets.

He had left early for his walk that evening, for Rosalys no longer ventured out on

tramps. Twice every week she went to the doctor's and presently, before the end of June . . . The evening had come softly, with the blue dusk settling gently as a curtain, now the night was full to overflowing with big twinkling stars and the moon was round and white in the sky as a Chinese lamp. He heard the little chanty of the waves against the rocks below the path as he swung past the cove, and grinned wryly at the superstition which had doubtless made the simple sound the echo of some ghostly chorus. Then he halted as abruptly as if he heard a sharp command.

She was coming toward him slowly, and at first he could not say if he saw her or if it were a trick of moonlight shining on the pebbles of the path.

She was tall, as tall as a tall man, and grandly made, like some heroic statue. There was about her nothing of color except her eyes, and they were indeterminate in hue, now gray, now blue, like sea-water. From neck to insteps she was encased in a long, flowing gown which might have been fine wool or linen, for it shone with a faint iridescence where the moonlight struck it, and across the forepart of her head she wore an ancient celtic *lann*, a crescent-shaped blade of silver which almost matched the hair beneath it, for the hair was such pale gold it might have passed for platinum or silver, and, laced with strands of pearls, it hung in two great braids as thick as a man's arm almost to the hem of her white robe. There were bracelets on her arms and round her throat a strand of pearls as white as ocean foam, but no whiter than the throat on which they rested. Her face he could not see, for just below her eyes was hung a veil of lace as fine as sea-spume, yet opaque as a casque of metal, but he knew instinctively that it was beautiful with a fairness like that of Trojan Helen which having gazed on once a man was past all saving, and beyond desire of being saved. She moved with a consummate grace, like a skater gliding over smooth ice, or a spirit floating, and he could have sworn the rounded pebbles of the sea-path were not moved beneath the pressure of her long and narrow feet.

It would not be quite true to say that he was frightened, but something very like fright filled his mind, and something like

a chill was in his brain as she approached him.

And then he was upon his knees while his blood pulsed in a quick, hurrying rhythm, and he felt his scalp grow tight and the hair on his head begin to prickle, for this was something awe-inspiring he saw, some creature from another world, a being out of some antique pantheon without a sense of kindness or compassion, demanding worship as her due, and making no requital for that worship.

"Welcome, Kelvy son of Kelvy," she said softly as she came to pause before him, and her voice was like the echoing of bells across a great distance. "Welcome back to the home of your fathers." He knew she did not speak in English nor in Erse, her words were in a tongue long since forgotten when the first foundation-stone of Khufu's pyramid was laid, yet he understood her perfectly.

"What—who are you, lady?" he asked breathlessly, knowing by instinct rather than reason she could understand him.

Her laugh was like the murmur of small waves upon a sandy beach, like water slipping gently over moss-clothed rocks. "I am what was and is and will be, Kelvy mic Kelvy. Since first the waters separated from the land I have been loved of men, and for those who win my favor I draw back my veil. Would you look on my face, Kelvy mic Kelvy?"

He could find no words for answer. He knew as he knew that he breathed that more than anything in life he wanted to look on the coldly classic face behind the shimmering veil, and yet some inward sentinel of the spirit warned him against the desire. To see her face would mean the end of something—something infinitely precious; life, perhaps.

Once more she laughed, not quite maliciously, but certainly not kindly. The sort of laugh a mistress might give at the puzzlement of a pet animal; indulgent, faintly amused, slightly contemptuous. She held her hand out to him and he raised it to his lips as if it were some holy reliquary. Her flesh was cold as the spray dashing on the rocks below, but firm and lovely to the touch, and he could feel the faintest taste of salt upon his lips when he had kissed all five of her

fingers, and her knuckles, and the cool, lined palm of her hand.

HE reeled and staggered like a drunken man all the way home, and when Rosalys met him with hands outstretched and eager lips uplifted he put her aside almost roughly, for suddenly his life seemed empty as a house in which no one had lived for a long time, and her mortal beauty was no match for that immortal fairness he had looked on, nor her warm gracious hands the equals of that cold and perfect hand which he had worshipped with his lips.

The next night he went out at dusk, and the next, and on the third she asked half playfully, half timidly, "Where is it that you're going every night, *avoureen*? The sea-walk is an evil place to wander in the moonlight, for the moruadh may be abroad, and I'll not be having her take my man from me—"

He turned on her, his brows drawn down, his lips pressed hard against his teeth, cold anger in his eyes. "I'm going out because it pleases me to do it, and where I go and what I do there is nobody's business."

She took a short step back and looked at him with wide, puzzled eyes. He had hurt her, hurt her terribly, but she held no resentment. She was only amazed at his unkindness.

His conscience cut him as he stamped along the sea-path. Rosalys was so gentle, so loving and confiding, but—he stamped the mounting flame of tenderness out ruthlessly—the radiant being from the sea, the goddess . . .

In a little while he reached the cove and presently she came, tall, lissome, lovely to regard, her sea-hued eyes alight with amusement as he knelt and put her hand to his lips.

The breath came fast in his throat and his heart seemed bursting as he looked up at her in adoration. "Lady," he murmured, "Lovely lady from the sea, show me your face. In pity's name I ask it. Put back your veil." Her laugh was like the sweep of gentle winds across the waters. "My face may be the last thing that you see, Kelvy mic Kelvy. Would you consent to that? What would you give to look upon it?"

"Anything—anything! My life, my soul,

all that I have and hope to have—" The very beating of his heart stopped the words in his throat, but his tortured eyes said what his lips could not.

There was satisfaction, gloating, in the low laugh of her answer. "Be it so, then Kelvy son of Kelvy. Come to me on the first night of the waning moon and you shall have your desire." Then she held her hands out to him and suffered him to kiss them.

His mind was scrambled as a dust-bin as he reeled home on the narrow path. She had promised, given him her word that he might look upon her face. No Mussulman intent upon the Prophet's Paradise, no sinner dying in the hope of pardon, could have looked forward more eagerly than he did to the fulfillment of her promise.

Once more the hand of conscience plucked at his thought. Rosalys . . . his sweet, kind Rosalys, whom he had hurt so bitterly that night, who was about to go down into the Valley of the Shadow . . . He put the thought from him as one might thrust a beggar aside. If only he were free, free from all entanglements . . . if Rosalys should not survive . . . his conscious mind revolted from the cynical-conclusion, but underneath his consciousness the thought kept festering . . . If she should not survive . . .

HE did not know that Rosalys had followed him when he flung out of the house, nor that she watched him as he knelt before the being who had put her spell on him. He did not see her hurry down the sea-path when he left his rendezvous, nor hear her challenge:

"Creature of the sea, give back my man. Heathen goddess, fairy-wife or ghost-thing, you cannot put the terror on me, for though I'm but a mortal woman the soul in me is immortal, and though I have no magic, my love for my man—"

He did not see the long white arms of the sea-woman reach out like the tentacles of a devil-fish, nor see the brief, sharp struggle on the narrow path. He did not see the two forms, locked in combat, hover for a moment on the unfenced rim of the footway, nor see them launch into the air to drop the eighty feet and more of the cliff's height, turning in their course end over end, wheel-

ing like the arms of a great windmill, striking with an almost soundless splash when they at last had reached the quiet water of the cove.

None of this he saw or heard, for he was like a man enmeshed in a charm, but when at last the lights of home shone like a beacon in the dark his love and loyalty had conquered. Rosalys and he were one, inextricably bound together by their plighted troth: ". . . these twain shall be one flesh . . . therefore shall a man leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife . . ."

"Rosalys!" he called as he let himself in. "I'm sorry, dear, so sorry and ashamed that I—*Rosalys!*" His voice reverberated like a shout in a tunnel. The little old house was as quiet as the craters of a dead world, as a church from which the worshippers had gone. The rooms once bright with candlelight and firelight, once full of the sweet scent of glowing peat and golden with the music of her singing voice were quiet with the quiet of a world that once had lived but now was dead. "Rosalys!" His voice had the hard raucousness of ripping fabric . . .

All night he walked a frustrated rectangle in the small sitting room, pausing at each little sound, looking eagerly down the bricked path of the garden, seeing her returning form in every shadow of the beech trees swaying with the night wind. He put the kettle on the hob, got out the tea caddy and the sugar bowl and cream jug—she might be chilled when she came home, a dish of tea would warm her. . . . And in the morning they came with the news that they had found her at the shore, with the fine high color gone from her face and the quiet waves caressing her as if they sought to rock her into deeper sleep.

Was he to blame? Was he her murderer? Peer Gynt had bred an imp on the daughter of the Troll King by mere lustful thought; could a vagrant, unexpressed wish—the momentary passionate upflaring of desire—have brought Rosalys to the water?

Beneath the risen moon the night was like fairyland. The shrubbery of the garden rustled gently in the small breeze and the moon-stained leaves shook softly; purple shadows and bright dancing highlights rushed together, blending in a maze of shimmering halftones. He rose slowly from

the big chair, moving stiffly like an infirm old man, and without stopping for his cap or topcoat, without so much as a glance back, went down the garden walk, let himself out at the gate, and shambled toward the sea-path.

She was magnificent in the cold glow of light reflected from the sky and sea. Straight, statuesque, "divinely tall and most divinely fair," she moved toward him with a grace like the passage of a wind across a field of growing grain. He did not kneel to her. Instead he looked directly in her sea-gray eyes and there was hatred in his gaze. This emanation from the cold, pitiless ocean, this being from another, older world . . . had it not been for her Rosalys, his Rosalys, might still be filling all the little Dower House with silver song and golden laughter while she waited for her rendezvous with destiny. . . .

"You have come, Kelvy son of Kelvy?" There was a questioning inflection in her tone, though she made the statement as an assertion. "You have not failed our tryst."

"Aye, I am here," his voice was hard and gritty, with an undertone of desperate bitterness, "I've come to tell you—"

"Look, Kelvy son of Kelvy," there was softness almost like a caress in her words, "this is what you came to see, is it not?" and from before her face she put the veil of shimmering fabric.

He gave a gasp, a small sound like that of a hurt animal, and his eyes widened as he looked and looked again as if he'd never have his fill of looking.

Her face was like a mask, immobile, inscrutable. The features were clear-cut as those of an itaglio, and faultless with the regularity seen in the sculptured faces of those goddesses the Greeks delighted to honor. The high broad brow continued down into the nose without the slightest indication of a curve and the mouth-beneath it was thin-lipped and rather large, but curved exquisitely into a perfect Cupid's bow and tinted the rich, glowing rose of coral. The chin was strong and inclined to be pointed, and the gray-blue eyes beneath the finely arching pale-gold brows were plumbless as the ocean's deepest depths. Her skin was an incredibly beautiful shade of ivory, not the

dead-white of marble, nor the faint pink of human flesh, but with a lightly glowing iridescence like that of a perfect pearl. Despite its coldly classic beauty there was longing in the face, an avid longing not to be denied; and yet a longing which seemed utterly impersonal, like the longing of the sea that takes and takes, yet never has its fill of sacrifices.

"Is this not what you came to see, Kelvy mic Kelvy?" asked the soft, entrancing voice as she held out white, bare arms to him.

He sobbed. A hard, dry, ugly sob that was the requiem and valedictory of his manhood. He hated and despised himself. He knew that for this sight he had paid out the last scruple of his honor, had given all the love and loyalty and faith he owed his woman, belike had thrown his soul into the balance to bring the scales down to the level of his lust, and so he sobbed with self-accusing bitterness.

Then he was in her arms. They closed about him as the sea might close about a drowning man, and he was helpless in their embrace. Helpless, and glad to be so. There was an odor of the fresh, cool sea about her, clean, invigorating, sharp with the keen smell of salt, and the lips pressed against his were cool as water stirring in the sea-caves in the stony shores of Aran.

She drew him to her still more tightly, and her great eyes closed, then opened part way, and between the lids he saw their shimmer, fiery-blue. There was neither warmth nor pulsing in her bosom, only a great, soothing coolness like the coolness of the summer ocean when the moon is down and the sun not yet risen.

There was a seething chaos in his brain; he was incapable of thought, and a frantic feeling in his breast. His heart fought like a caged bird and his pulses hurried with a rhythm like the rattling of hailstones against a roof. The breath was going out of him. The breath, the life, the soul of him was flowing from his mouth and into hers.

Two bodies locked in an unbreakable embrace slipped from the unfenced lip of the sea-path and dropped in a long arc into the moonlit waters of the cove.

There was a splash, a ripple, and then silence.