

## A Complete Story.

## THE WRAITH

By DORA SIGERSON SHORTER.

John O'Driscoll walked up and down the little breen that led to the wood, his heart bitter within him. A young moon looked down upon him silently. A bird twittered sleepily in the hedge close by; disturbed, no doubt, by his restless tread.

He was a jealous man, John O'Driscoll, and quick to fly suspicious. He drew forth his watch and glanced at it impatiently; it was still warm from the hot hand that had closed upon it but a moment before. Mary Ryan was late at the trysting-place, where so often she arrived before her time. Her father was from home to-night and her mother was his friend; there was nothing to keep her, nothing except her own desires.

James Farrell loved her. Was there anything in that?

John O'Driscoll ground his heel into the path and cursed below his breath. Over the crooked bridge that led to the trysting-place a little figure came, white-cheeked and frighten-eyed; she ran looking over her shoulder, so she stumbled often on her way.

John O'Driscoll sat forlorn at the foot of the great tree that so often listened to his love story, and never till to-night beheld him deserted. His eyes were hot with anger and his heart cold within him, so that, when the little flying figure came to ward him with outspread arms, he had no welcome for it.

She sat weeping beside him, but did not attempt to embrace him. She clasped her empty hands loosely before her and bent her sad gaze upon him, fearful of his anger.

"I would have been with you," she said, "long ago, but for a strange thing that passed me on the road." She shuddered as if with the cold.

"And what was that?" said John O'Driscoll roughly, "that kept you so late? I am weary waiting you."

"It was the corpse of a young girl," she said; her eyes looked as though she had seen a vision, "and she shrouded all in white from head to foot."

"Who was she?" said John O'Driscoll and his voice softened to tenderness. "Some friend you loved, some comrade you could ill spare? Otherwise I know you would not have deserted your own true love and left him here to mourn your absence. Who was she that made you forget the trysting hour was past?"

"Oh, that I could discover," Mary said softly, "but her dead face was turned from me, and the mourners' faces were hidden as they passed."

"And if you could not see her, why did you not leave the place and hasten to me? Your curiosity was ill-advised, since you liked better the gruesome sight than my love and embraces."

Mary Ryan laid her soft hand upon his arm, as though pleading forgiveness.

"Now I know not why I stayed, but some strange power drew me to follow so I could not leave the sad corpse till it was underground."

"And where did they bury the maid?" John O'Driscoll questioned, his curiosity aroused. "Behind the church upon the hill or in St. Mary's graveyard, though I heard no keening and would have, had it been so near."

"Neither on the churchyard by the hill nor in St. Mary's did they bring the corpse for burial, but where the four cross-roads do meet they dug her grave, and all silently without prayer or cry they closed the hard earth in upon her, and while I wept over her desolation they disappeared, so I knew not who she was or those who mourned her."

Now, in John O'Driscoll's heart a suspicion arose and would not be still. Sad as the sight was, it was not one to bring such tears or pallor to his sweetheart's face. Surely she had some better excuse than this, that a suicide had been buried in the four cross-roads; such a sight was not so uncommon, nor was it sufficient excuse for his long waiting. He turned upon her angrily.

"Was it, then, so strange a sight that you should follow like a little child attracted by a passing show, and leave me here forgotten, waiting in impatience?"

Mary Ryan burst into tears at his anger and in her own terror of what she had seen.

"Oh," she said fearfully, "they whispered my name as they passed, my name, each mourner that followed the corpse. I could hear it passed from lip to lip, so I had to follow. What does it mean, my John, I am frightened."

John O'Driscoll rose to his feet and drew her up beside him, his lips were pressed together in a determined line.

"Come," he said, "let us go and see who it was, for your tale fills me with wonder." He took her hand loosely in his, for her story had not satisfied him in its telling.

And as they went on their way they met

the old priest who had the little church upon the hilltop.

"Father," said John O'Driscoll, "who was the young maid they buried to-day, and how did death come to her?"

Now the priest looked mildly through his glasses at the young pair before him.

"I have heard of no death nor no burial," said he, and looked surprised. "Where did you hear the news?"

"Perhaps it was a mistake," said John O'Driscoll, and there was sternness in his voice as he bid the father good-bye and drew Mary Ryan on beside him.

And as they went over the little bridge leading to the cross roads he saw, leaning over the parapet, the young priest who had the church of St. Mary's; and he stopped and spoke.

"Father," he said, "they say a maid took her life and was buried to-day in the cross roads. Have you heard anything of this?"

"No," said the young priest, lifting his eyes from the passing waters. "What poor child has been so unfortunate?"

When John O'Driscoll heard the priest's denial he laughed, but the laugh was not good to hear.

"It is but a story, father; who told it did not speak the truth, that I know now." He tightened his hand till Mary nearly cried in the pain of his fingers, but he bid the father a gruff good-day and strode on, hurrying her after him. And so in silence they came to where the four cross roads met.

When he came there he cast his eyes upon the ground, but, though the dust lay thick and white upon it, there was no sign of any disturbance, no spade mark, no track of any feet. The wind blew the white earth into little whirlpools, and, lifting it into the air, tossed it far and wide over the hedges that bordered the lonesome road.

John O'Driscoll looked at his sweetheart with furious eyes, she met his with a bewildered gaze. But he laughed again his ugly laugh and flung her hand from him.

"That was a foolish story to tell me, Mary Ryan," he said. "And by the lie you told me to-day I know you for a false maid. I shall leave you now and never shall you see me more. I am well quit of one who could so deceive her lover, for she would not be good to bring into my mother's house." With that he turned upon his heel and went his way without once looking back.

When Mary heard the echo of his footsteps dying away in the distance, she crouched down in the dust, weeping.

"What evil thing did I see that took my senses from me," she cried, "to bring such misfortunes upon me; what fairy sight was it that it was my grief to come upon? Now my love has left me, and I no longer can live without him."

She rose from the hard ground and drew her shawl about her, shivering. And down the side of the deep stream she moved, under the crooked bridge she went with careless feet.

The young priest, who still looked into the flowing waters started, for he thought he heard a woman crying; but when he listened again he knew it was but the moving of the stream, leaping from stone to stone or pushing aside the reeds upon the banks.

For three days John O'Driscoll travelled over the country without stop or stay, but far as he went and quick as he went he seemed always to hear Mary Ryan's voice calling to him, as if in great trouble.

At night her face came before him in his dreams, so he feared to sleep; and by day the longing for her came so strong he could no longer bear it, and turned his face home. In the early morning he arrived and bent his steps half-unconsciously towards the place he had seen her. He felt she would still be there crouching in the dust as he had left her, but when he reached the place he smiled at his own foolishness. There was no one at the cross roads to meet him.

He started back as he looked around, for at his feet, cut in the hard ground, he saw a deep and narrow grave; someone was to be buried here to-day. He thought of the story Mary had told him and drew his hand across his eyes in wonder.

Here, up the winding path, over the crooked bridge, he saw a dark procession come. He crouched beside the hedge to watch.

And, as he hid, he heard Mary Ryan's name whispered on the tongues of the mourners.

"Poor Mary. Well it is that her mother is not alive to see her daughter buried in unholy ground. What came to her to take her innocent life? Poor Mary Ryan."

But Mary passed at the head of the throng, sleeping so peacefully with a smile upon her face. No move did she make, no word did she say, even as she passed her lover so close that her shroud flapped across his cheek.

Neither did she abate her strange smile, when the clanging of a digging spade made him hide his face.

When he raised his head she was no more before him; the mourners, too, were going up the steep road that led to the church on the hill, some down the crooked path that led to St. Mary's—he could hear the sweet bells calling them to prayer.

And before him there was nothing save the white road, where the high wind lifted the dust in a soft shower, and scattered it over the disturbed earth between the four cross roads.—"Pearson's Magazine."