

MORAG OF THE GLEN

I



IT was a black hour for Archibald Campbell of Gorromalt in Strathglas, and for his wife, and for Morag their second daughter, when the word came that Muireall had the sorrow of sorrows. What is pain, and is death a thing to fear? But there is a sorrow that no man can have and yet go free for evermore of a shadow upon his brow : and there is a sorrow that no woman can have, and keep the moonshine in her eyes. And when a woman has this sorrow, it saves or mars her : though, for sure, none of us may discern just what that saving may be, or from whom or what, or what may be that bitter or sweet ruin. We are shaped as clay in the potter's hand : ancient wisdom, that we seldom learn till the hand is mercifully still, and the vessel, finished for good or evil, is broken.

It is a true saying that memory is like the seaweed when the tide is in—but the tide ebbs ! Each frond, each thick spray, each fillicaun or pulpy globe, lives lightly in the wave : the green water is full of strange rumour, of sea-magic and sea-music : the hither flow and thither surge give continuity and connection to what is fluid and dissolute. But when the ebb is far gone, and the wrack and the weed lie sickly in the light, there is only one confused inter-tangled mass. For most of us, memory is this tide-left strand : though for each there are pools, or shallows which even the ebb does not lick up in its thirsty way depthward,—narrow overshadowed channels to which we have the intangible clues. But for me there will never be any ebb-tide of memory, for one black hour, and one black day.

A wild lone place it was where we lived : among the wet hills, in a country capped by slate-black mountains. To the stranger the whole scene must have appeared grimly desolate. We, dwellers there, and those of our clan, and the hill folk about and beyond, knew that there were three fertile straths hidden among the wilderness of rock and bracken : Strathmòr, Strathgorm, and Strathglas. It was in the last we lived. All Strathglas was farmed by Archibald Campbell, and he had Strathgorm to where the Gorromalt

Water cut it off from the head of Glen Annet. The house we lived in was a long two-storied whitewashed building with two projecting flanks. There was no garden, but only a tangled potato-acre, and a large unkempt space where the kail and the bracken flourished side by side, with the kail perishing day by day under the spreading strangling roots of the usurper. The rain in Strathglas fell when most other spots were fair. It was because of the lie of the land, I have heard. The gray or black cloud would slip over Ben-Bhreac or Melbèinn, and would become blue-black while one were wondering if the wind would lift it on to Maol-Dunn, whose gloomy ridge had two thin lines of pine-trees which, from Strathglas, stood out like bristling eyebrows. But, more likely than not, it would lean slowly earthward, and sometimes lurch like a water-logged vessel, and then spill, through a rising misty vapour, a dreary downfall. Oh! the rain—the rain—the rain! how weary I grew of it, there; and of the melancholy *mél'ing* of the sheep, that used to fill the hills with a lamentation, terrible, at times, to endure.

And yet, I know, and that well, too, that I am thinking this vision of Teenabrae, as the house was called, and of its dismal vicinage, in the light of tragic memory. For there were seasons when the rains suspended, or came and went like fugitive moist shadows: days when the sunlight and the wind made the mountains wonderful, and wrought the wild barren hills nearer us to take on a softness and a dear familiar beauty: hours, even, when, in the hawthorn-time, the cuckoo called joyously across the pine-girt scaurs and corries on Melbèinn, or, in summer, the swallows filled the straths as with the thridding of a myriad shuttles.

Sure enough, I was too young to be there: though, indeed, Morag was no more than a year older, being twenty; but when my mother died, and my father went upon the seas upon one of his long whaling voyages, I was glad to leave my lonely home in the Carse o' Gowrie and go to Teenabrae in Strathglas, and to be with my aunt, that was wife to Archibald mac Alasdair Ruadh—Archibald Campbell, as he would be called in the lowland way—or Gorromalt as he was named by courtesy, that being the name of his sheep-farm that ran into the two straths where the Gorromalt Water surged turbulently through a narrow wilderness of wave-scooped, eddy-hollowed stones and ledges.

I suppose no place could be called lifeless that had always that sound of Gorromalt Water, that ceaseless lamentation of the sheep crying upon the hills, that hoarse croaking of the corbies which swam black in the air betwixt us and Maol-Dunn, that mournful plaining of the lapwings as they wheeled

querulously for ever and ever and ever. But, to a young girl, the whole of this was an unspeakable weariness.

Beside the servant-folk—not one of whom was to me anything, save a girl called Maisie, who had had a child and believed it had become a “pee-wit” since its death, and that all the lapwings were the offspring of the sorrow of joy—there were only Archibald Campbell, his wife, who was my aunt, Muireall the elder daughter, and Morag. These were my folk : but Morag I loved. In appearance she and I differed wholly. My cousin Muireall and I were like each other ; both tall, dark-haired, dark-browed, with dusky dark eyes, though mine with no flame in them ; and my face too, though comely I am glad to know, without that touch of wildness which made Muireall’s so strangely attractive, and at times so beautiful. Morag, however, was scarce over medium height. Her thick wavy hair always retained the captive gold that the sunshine had spilled there ; her soft, white, delicate, wild-rose face was like none other that I have ever seen : her eyes, of that heart-lifting blue which spring mornings have, held a living light that was fair to see, and gave pain too, perhaps, because of their plaintive hillside wildness. Ah, she was a fawn, Morag ! . . . soft and sweet, swift and dainty and exquisite as a fawn in the green fern.

Gorromalt himself was a gaunt stern man. He was 6 feet 3 inches, but looked less, because of a stoop. It always seemed to me as if his eyes pulled him forward : brooding, sombre, obscure eyes, of a murky gloom. His hair was iron-gray and matted ; blacker, but matted and tangled, his thick beard, and his face was furrowed like Ben Scorain of the Corries. I never saw him in any other garb than a gray shepherd tweed with a plaid, though no Campbell in Argyll was prouder than he, and he allowed no plaid or *tunag* anywhere on his land or in his house that was not of the tartan of MacCailin Mòr. He was what, there, they called a black protestant ; for the people in that part held to the ancient faith. True enough, for sure, all the same : for his pity was black, and the milk of kindness in him must have been like Gorromalt Water in spate. Poor Aunt Elspeth ! my heart often bled for her. I do not think Archibald Campbell was unkind to his wife, but he was harsh, and his sex was like a blank wall to her, against which her shallow waters surged or crawled alike vainly. There was to her something at once terrible and Biblical in this wall of cruel strength, this steadfast independence of love or the soft ways or the faltering speech of love. There are women who hate men with an unknowing hatred, who lie by their husband night after night, year after year ; who fear and serve him ; who tend him in life and minister

to him in death ; who die, before or after, with a slaying thirst, a consuming hunger. Of these unhappy housemates, of desolate hearts and unfrequented lips, my aunt Elspeth was one.

It was on a dull Sunday afternoon that the dark hour came of which I have spoken. The rain fell among the hills. There was none on the north side of Strathglas, where Teenabrae stood solitary. The remembrance is on me keen just now : how I sat there, on the bench in front of the house, side by side with Morag, in the hot August damp, with the gnats pinging overhead, and not a sound else save the loud raucous surge of Gorromalt Water, thirty yards away. In a chair near us sat my aunt Elspeth. Beyond her, on a milking-stool, with his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees, was her husband.

There was a gloom upon all of us. The day before, as soon as Gorromalt had returned from Castle Avale, high up in Strathmòr, we had seen the black east wind in his eyes. But he had said nothing. We guessed that his visit to the Englishman at Castle Avale, who had bought the Three Straths from Sir Ewan Campbell of Drumdoon, had proved fruitless, or at least unsatisfactory. It was at the porridge on the Sabbath morning that he told us.

“And . . . and . . . must we go, Archibald?” asked his wife, her lips white, and the deep withered creases on her neck ashy gray.

He did not answer, but the tumbler cracked in his grip, and the splintered glass fell into his plate. The spilt milk trickled off the table on to the end of his plaid, and so to the floor. Luath, the collie, slipped forward, with her tongue lolling greedily : but her eye caught the stare of the silent man, and with a whine, and a sudden sweep of her tail, she slunk back.

It must have been nigh an hour later, that he spoke.

“No, Elspeth,” he said. “There will be no going away from here, for you and me, till we go feet foremost.”

Before the afternoon we had heard all : how he had gone to see this English lord who had “usurped” Drumdoon : how he had not gained an interview, and had seen no other than Mr. Laing, the East Lothian factor. He had had to accept bitter hard terms. Sir Ewan Campbell was in Madras, with his regiment, a ruined man : he would never be home again, and, if he were, would be a stranger in the Three Straths, where he and his had lived, and where his kindred had been born and had died during six centuries back. There was no hope. This Lord Greyshott wanted more rent, and he also wanted Strathgorm for a deer-run.

We were sitting, brooding on these things : in our ears the fierce words

that Gorromalt had said, with bitter curses, upon the selling of the ancient land and the betrayal of the people.

Morag was in one of her strange moods. I saw her, with her shining eyes, looking at the birch that overhung the small foaming linn beyond us, just as though she saw the soul of it, and the soul with strange speech to it.

"Where is Muireall?" she said to me suddenly, in a low voice.

"Muireall?" I repeated, "Muireall? I am not for knowing, Morag. Why do you ask? Do you want her?"

She did not answer, but went on:

"Have you seen him again?"

"Him? . . . Whom?"

"Jasper Morgan, this English lord's son."

"No."

A long silence followed. Suddenly Aunt Elspeth started. Pointing to a figure coming from the peat-moss at the hither end of Strathmòr, she asked who it was, as she could not see without her spectacles. Her husband rose, staring eagerly. He gave a grunt of disappointment when he recognized Mr. Allan Stewart, the minister of Strathmòr parish.

As the old man drew near we watched him steadfastly. I have the thought that each one of us knew he was coming to tell us evil news; though none guessed why or what, unless Morag mayhap.

When he had shaken hands, and blessed the house and those within it, Mr. Stewart sat down on the bench beside Morag and me. I am thinking he wanted not to see the eyes of Gorromalt, nor to see the white face of Aunt Elspeth.

I heard him whisper to my dear that he wanted her to go into the house for a little. But she would not. The birdeen knew that sorrow was upon us all. He saw "no" in her eyes, and forbore.

"And what is the thing that is on your lips to tell, Mr. Stewart?" said Gorromalt at last, half mockingly, half sullenly.

"And how are you for knowing that I have anything to tell, Gorromalt?"

"Sure, man, if a kite can see the shadow of a mouse a mile away, it can see a black cloud on a hill near by!"

"It's a black cloud I bring, Archibald Campbell: alas, even so. Ay, sure, it is a black cloud it is. God melt the pain of it!"

"Speak, man!"

"There is no good in wading in heather. Gorromalt, and you, Mrs.

Campbell, and you, my poor Morag, and you too, my dear, must just be brave. It is God's will."

"Speak, man, and don't be winding the shroud all the time! Let us be hearing and seeing the thing you have brought to tell us."

It was at this moment that Aunt Elspeth half rose, and abruptly reseated herself, raising the while a deprecatory feeble hand.

"Is it about Muireall?" she asked quaveringly. "She went away, to the church at Kilbrennan, at sunrise: and the water's in spate all down Strathgorm. Has she been drowned? Is it death upon Muireall? Is it Muireall? Is it Muireall?"

"She is not drowned, Mrs. Campbell."

At that she sat back, the staring dread subsiding from her eyes. But at the minister's words, Gorromalt slowly moved his face and body so that he fronted the speaker. Looking at Morag, I saw her face white as the canna. Her eyes swam in wet shadow.

"It is not death, Mrs. Campbell," the old man repeated, with a strange, uneasy, furtive look, as he put his right hand to his stiff white necktie and flutteringly fingered it.

"In the name o' God, man, speak out!"

"Ay, ay, Campbell: ay, ay, I am speaking . . . I am for the telling . . . but . . . but, see you, Gorromalt, be pitiful . . . be . . ."

Gorromalt rose. I never realized before how tall he was. There was height to him, like unto that of a son of Anak.

"Well, well, well, it is just for telling you I'll be. Sit down, Gorromalt, sit down, Mr. Campbell, sit down, man, sit down! . . . Ah, sure now, that is better. Well, well, God save us all from the sin that is in us: but . . . ah, mothering heart, it is saving you I would be if I could, but . . . but . . ."

"But *what!*" thundered Gorromalt, with a voice that brought Maisie and Kirsteen out of the byre, where they were milking the kye.

"He has the mercy: He only! And it is this, poor people: it is this. Muireall has come to sorrow."

"What sorrow is the sorrow that is on her?"

"The sorrow of woman."

A terrible oath leapt from Gorromalt's lips. His wife sat in a stony silence, her staring eyes filming like those of a stricken bird. Morag put her left hand to her heart.

Suddenly Archibald Campbell turned to his daughter.

"Morag, what is the name of that man whom Muireall came to know

when she and you went to that Sodom, that Gomorrha, which men call London?"

"His name was Jasper Morgan."

"Has she ever seen him since?"

"I think so."

"You *think*? What will you be *thinking* for, girl! *Think!* There will be time enough to think while the lichen grows gray on a new-fall'n rock! Out with it! Out with it! Have they met. . . . Has he been here . . . is *he* the man?"

There was silence then. A plover wheeled by, plaining aimlessly. Maisie the milk-lass ran forward, laughing.

"Ah, 'tis my wee Seorsa," she cried. "Seorsa! Seorsa! Seorsa!"

Gorromalt took a stride forward, his face shadowy with anger, his eyes ablaze.

"Get back to the kye, you wanton wench!" he shouted savagely. "Get back, or it is getting my gun I'll be and shooting that pee-wit o' yours, that lennavan-Seorsa!"

Then, shaking still, he turned to Morag.

"Out with it, girl! What do you know?"

"I know nothing."

"It is a lie, and it is knowing it I am!"

"It is no lie. I *know* nothing. I *fear* much."

"And what do *you* know, old man?" And, with that, Archibald Campbell turned like a baited bull upon Mr. Stewart.

"She was misled, Gorromalt, she was misled, poor lass! The trouble began last May, when she went away to the south, to that evil place. And then he came after her. And it was here he came . . . and . . . and . . ."

"And who will that man be?"

"Morag has said it: Jasper Morgan."

"And who will Jasper Morgan be?"

"Are you not for knowing *that*, Archibald Campbell, and you *Gorromalt*?"

"Why, what meaning are you at?" cried the man, bewildered.

"Who will Jasper Morgan be but the son of Stanley Morgan?"

"Stanley Morgan! . . . Stanley Morgan! . . . I am no wiser. Do you wish to send me mad, man! Speak out! . . . out with it!"

"Why, Gorromalt, what is Drumdoon's name?"

"Drumdoon . . . Why, Sir Ewan . . . Ah no, for sure 'tis now that

English bread-taker, that southern land-snatcher, who calls himself Lord Greyshott. And what then? . . . will it be for . . .”

“Aren’t you for knowing his name? . . . No? . . . Campbell, man, it is *Morgan . . . Morgan.*”

All this time Aunt Elspeth had sat silent. She now gave a low cry. Her husband turned and looked at her. “Go into the house,” he said harshly; “this will not be the time for whimpering; no, by God! it is not the time for whimpering, woman.”

She rose, and walked feebly over to Mr. Stewart.

“Tell me all,” she said. Ah, grief to see, the pain in her old, old eyes—and no tears there at all, at all.

“When this man Jasper Morgan, that is son to Lord Greyshott, came here, it was to track a stricken doe. And now all is over. There is this note only. It is for Morag.”

Gorromalt leaned forward to take it. But I had seen the wild look in Morag’s eyes, and I snatched it from Mr. Stewart, and gave it to my dear, who slipped it beneath her kerchief.

Sullenly her father drew up, scowled, but said nothing.

“What else?” he asked, turning to the minister.

“She is dying.”

“Dying!”

“Ay, alas, alas—*tha cèò air a bheinn*—the mist is on the hill—and she so young, too, and so fair, ay, and so sweet and——”

“That will do, Allan Stewart! That will do! . . . It is dying she is, you are for telling us! Well, well, now, and she the plaything o’ Jasper Morgan, the son of the man there at Drumdoon, the man who wants to drive me away from here . . . this *new* man . . . this, this lord . . . he . . . to drive *me* away, and who have the years and years to go upon, ay, for more than six hundred weary long years——”

“Muireall is dying, Alexander Campbell. Will you be coming to see her, who is your very own?”

“And for why is she dying?”

“She could not wait.”

“Wait! Wait! She could wait to shame me and mine! No, no, no, Allan Stewart, you go back to Lord Greyshott’s son and his *leannan*, and say that neither Gorromalt nor any o’ Gorromalt’s kith or kin will have aught to do with that wastrel-lass. Let her death be on her! But it’s a soon easy death it is! . . . she that slept here this very last night, and away this

morning across the moor like a louping doe, before sunburst and an hour to that!"

"She is at the 'Argyll Arms' in Kilbrennan. She met the man there. An hour after he had gone, they found her, lying on the deerskin on the hearth, and she with the death-sickness on her, and grave-white, because of the poison there beside her. And now, Archibald Campbell, it is not refusing you will be to come to your own daughter, and she with death upon her, and at the edge o' the silence!"

But with that Gorromalt uttered wild, savage words, and thrust the old man before him, and bade him begone, and cursed Muireall, and the child she bore within her, and the man who had done this thing, and the father that had brought him into the world, latest adder of an evil brood!

Scarce, however, was the minister gone, and he muttering sore, and frowning darkly at that, than Gorromalt reeled and fell.

The blood had risen to his brain, and he had had a stroke. Sure, the sudden hand of God is a terrifying thing. It was all we could do, with the help of Maisie and Kirsteen, to lift and drag him to his bed.

But an hour after that, when the danger was over, I went to seek Morag. I could find her nowhere. Maisie had seen her last. I thought that she had taken one of the horses from the stable, and ridden towards Kilbrennan: but there was no sign of this. On the long weary moor-road that led across Strathglas to Strathgorm, no one could have walked without being seen by some one at Teenabrae. And everyone there was now going to and fro, with whispers and a dreadful awe.

So I turned and went down by the linn. From there I could see three places where Morag loved to lie and dream: and at one of these I hoped to descry her.

And, sure, so it was. A glimpse I caught of her, across the spray of the linn. She was far up the brown Gorromalt Water, and crouched under a rowan-tree.

When I reached her she looked up with a start. Ah, the pain of those tear-wet May-blue eyes—deep tarns of grief to me they seemed.

In her hand she clasped the letter that I had won for her.

"Read it, dear," she said, simply.

It was in pencil, and, strangely, was in the Gaelic: strangely, for though, when with Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, Morag and I spoke the language we all loved, and that was our own, Muireall rarely did. The letter ran somewhat thus:

“MORAG-À-GHRAIDH,

“When you get this I shall not be your living sister any more, but only a memory. I take the little one with me. You know my trouble. Forgive me. I have only one thing to ask. The man has not only betrayed me, he has lied to me about his love. He loves another woman. And that woman, Morag, is *you*: *and you know it*. He loved you *first*. And now, Morag, I will only tell you one thing. Do you remember the story that old Sheen McIan told us—that about the twin sisters of the mother of our mother—one that was a Morag too?

“I am thinking you do: and here—where I shall soon be lying dead, with that silence within me, where such a wild clamouring voice has been, though inaudible to other ears than mine—*here, I am thinking you will be remembering, and realizing, that story!*”

“If, Morag, *if* you do not remember—but ah, no, we are of the old race of Siol Dhiarmid, *and you will remember!*”

“Tell no one of this, except F.—*at the end*.”

“Morag, dear sister, till we meet—

“MUIREALL.”

“I do not understand, Morag-my-heart,” I said. Even now, my hand shook because of these words: “*and that woman, Morag, is you: and you know it.*”

“Not now,” she answered, wearily. “I will tell you to-night: but not now.”

And so we went back together, she too tired and stricken for tears, and I with so many in my heart that there none for my hot eyes.

As we passed the byre we heard Kirsteen finishing a milking song, but we stopped when Maisie suddenly broke in, with her strange, wild, haunting-sweet voice.

I felt Morag’s fingers tighten in their grasp on my arm as we stood silent, with averted eyes, listening to an old Gaelic ballad of “Morag of the Glen.”

When Morag of the Glen was fëy
They took her where the Green Folk stray:
And there they left her, night and day,
A day and night they left her, fëy.

And when they brought her home again,
Aye of the Green Folk was she fain:
They brought her *leannan*, Roy McLean,
She looked at him with proud disdain.

“For I have killed a man,” she said,
 “A better man than you to wed :
 I slew him when he claspt my head,
 And now he sleepeth with the dead.

“And did you see that little wren?
 My sister dear it was, flew then !
 That skull her home, that eye her den,
 Her song is, *Morag o’ the Glen!*”

“For when she went I did not go,
 But washed my hands in blood-red woe :
 O wren, trill out your sweet song’s flow,
Morag is white as the driven snow!”

II

That night the wind had a dreadful soughing in its voice—a lamentable voice that came along the rain-wet face of the hills, with a prolonged moaning and sobbing.

Down in the big room, that was kitchen and sitting-room in one, where Gorrormalt sat—for he had risen from his bed, for all that he was so weak and giddy—there was semi-darkness. His wife had pleaded for the oil-lamp, because the shadows within and the wild wind without—though, I am thinking, most the shadows within her brain—filled her with dread ; but he would not have it, no, not a candle even. The peats glowed, red-hot ; above them the small narrow pine-logs crackled in a scarlet and yellow blaze.

Hour after hour went by in silence. There were but the three of us. Morag? Ah, did Gorrormalt think she would stay at Teenabrae, and Muireall near by, and in the clutch of the death-frost, and she, her sister dear, not go to her? He had put the ban upon us, soon as the blood was out of his brain, and he could half rise from his pillow. No one was to go to see her, no one was to send word to her, no one was to speak of her.

At that, Aunt Elspeth had fallen on her knees beside the bed, and prayed to him to show pity. The tears rained upon the relentless heavy hand she held and kissed. “At the least,” she moaned, “at the least, let some one go to her, Archibald ; at least a word, only one word !”

“Not a word, woman, not a word. She has sinned, but that’s the way o’ women o’ that kind. Let her be. The wind ’ll blow her soul against God’s heavy hand, this very night o’ the nights. It’s not for you nor for me. But I’m saying this, I am : curse her, ay, curse her again and again, for that she let

the son of the stranger, the son of our enemy, who would drive us out of the home we have, the home of our fathers, ay, back to the time when no English foot ever trod the heather of Argyll, that she would let him do her this shame and disgrace, her and me, an' you too, ay, and all of our blood, and the Strath too, for that—ay, by God, and the clan, the whole clan!”

But though Gorromalt's word was law there, there was one who had the tide coming in at one ear and going out at the other. As soon as the rainy gloom deepened into dark, she slipped from the house; I wanted to go with her, but she whispered to me to stay. It was well I did. I was able to keep back from him, all night, the story of Morag's going. He thought she was in her bed. So bitter on the man was his wrath, that, ill as he was, he would have risen, and ridden or driven over to Kilbrennan, had he known Morag was gone there.

Angus Macallum, Gorromalt's chief man, was with the horses in the stable. He tried to prevent Morag taking out Gealcas, the mare, she that went faster and surer than any there. He even put hand upon the lass, and said a rough word. But she laughed, I am told; and I am thinking that whoever heard Morag laugh, when she was “strange,” for all that she was so white and soft, she with her hair o' sunlight, and the blue, blue eyes o' her!—whoever heard *that* would not be for standing in her way.

So Angus had stood back, sullenly giving no help, but no longer daring to interfere. She mounted Gealcas, and rode away into the dark rainy night where the wind went louping to and fro among the crags on the braes as though it were mad with fear or pain, and complaining wild, wild—the lamentable cry of the hills.

Hour after hour we sat there. We could hear the roaring sound of Gorromalt Water as it whirled itself over the linn. The stream was in spate, and would be boiling black, with livid clots of foam flung here and there on the dripping heather overhanging the torrent. The wind's endless sough came into the house, and wailed in the keyholes and the chinks. Rory, the blind collie, lay on a mat near the door, and the long hair of his felt was blown upward, and this way and that, by the ground-draught.

Once or twice Aunt Elspeth rose, and stirred the porridge that seethed and bubbled in the pot. Her husband took no notice. He was in a daze, and sat in his flanked leathern armchair, with his arms laid along the sides, and his down-clasping hands catching the red gleam of the peats, and his face, white and set, like that of a dead man looking out of a grated prison.

Once or twice, an hour or so before, when she had begun to croon some

hymn, he had harshly checked her. But now when she hummed, and at last openly sang the Gaelic version of "The Lord's my Shepherd," he paid no heed. He was not hearing that, or anything she did. I could make nothing of the cold bitterness that was on his face. He brooded, I doubt not, upon doom for the man, and the son of the man, who had wrought him this evil.

His wife saw this, and so had her will at last. She took down the great Gaelic Bible, and read Christ's words about little children. The rain slashed against the window-panes. Beyond, the wind moaned, and soughed, and moaned. From the kennel behind the byre a mournful howling rose and fell; but Gorrormalt did not stir.

Aunt Elspeth looked at me despairingly. Poor old woman; ah, the misery and pain of it, the weariness and long pain of starved hearts and barren hope. Suddenly an idea came to her. She rose again, and went over to the fire. Twice she passed in front of her husband. He made no sign.

"He hates those things," she muttered to me, her eyes wet with pain, and with something of shame, too, for admitting that she believed in incantations. And why not, poor old woman? Sure there are stranger things than *sean* or *rosad*, charm or spell; and who can say that the secret old wisdom is mere foam o' thought. "He hates those things, but I am for saving my poor lass if I can. I will be saying that old ancient *eolas*, that is called the *Eolas an t-Snaithean*."

"What is that, Aunt Elspeth? What are the three threads?"

"That *eolas* killed the mother of my mother, dearie; she that was a woman out of the isle of Benbecula."

"Killed her!" I repeated, awe-struck.

"Ay; 'tis a charm for the doing away of bewitchment, and sure it is my poor Muireall who has been bewitched. But my mother's mother used the *eolas* for the taking away of a curse upon a cow that would not give milk. She was saying the incantation for the third time, and winding the triple thread round the beast's tail, when in a moment all the ill that was in the cow came forth and settled upon her, so that she went back to her house quaking and sick with the blight, and died of it next day, because there was no one to take it from her in turn by that or any other *eolas*."

I listened in silence. The thing seemed terrible to me then; no, no, not then only, but now, too, whenever I think of it.

"Say it then, Aunt Elspeth," I whispered; "say it, in the name of the Holy Three."

With that she went on her knees, and leaned against her chair, though with her face towards her husband, because of the fear that was ever in her. Then in a low voice, choked with sobs, she said this *colas*, after she had first uttered the holy words of the "Pater Noster":

"Chi suil thu,
Labhraidh bial thu ;
Smuainichidh cridhe thu.
Tha Fear an righthighe
Gad' choisreagadh,
An t-Athair, am Mac, 's an Spiorad Naomh.

"Ceathrar a rinn do chron—
Fear agus bean,
Gille agus nighean.
Co tha gu sin a thilleadh ?
Tri Pearsannan na Trianaid ro-naomh,
An t-Athair, am Mac, 's an Spioraid Naomh.

"Tha mi 'cur fianuis gu Moire, agus gu Brighde,
Ma 's e duine rinn do chron,
Le droch run,
No le droch shuil,
No le droch chridhe,
Gu'm bi thusa, Muireall gu math
Ri linn so a chur mu 'n cuairt ort.
An ainm an Athar, a' Mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh !"

("An eye will see you,
Tongue will speak of you
Heart will think of you
The Man of Heaven
Blesses you—
The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

"Four caused your hurt—
Man and Wife,
Young man, and maiden.
Who is to frustrate that?
The three Persons of the most Holy Trinity,
The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

"I call the Virgin Mary and St. Bridget to witness
That if your hurt was caused by man,
Through ill will,
Or the evil eye,
Or a wicked heart,
That you, Muireall, my daughter, may be whole—
And this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost !")

Just as she finished, and as she was lingering on the line, "*Gu'm bi thusa, Muireall, gu math,*" Rory, the blind collie, rose, whimpered, and stood with snarling jaws.

Strangely enough, Gorromalt heard this, though his ears had been deaf to all else, or so it seemed, at least.

"Down, Rory! down, beast!" he exclaimed, in a voice strangely shrill and weak.

But the dog would not be still. His sullen fear grew worse. Suddenly he sidled and lay on his belly, now snarling, now howling, his blind eyes distended, his nostrils quivering, his flanks quaking. My uncle rose and stared at the dog.

"What ails the beast?" he asked angrily, looking now at Rory, now at us. "Has any one come in? Has any one been at the door?"

"No one, Archibald."

"What have you been doing, Elspeth?"

"Nothing."

"Woman, I heard your voice droning at your prayers. Ah, I see—you have been at some of your *sians* and *colais* again. Sure, now, one would be thinking you would have less foolishness, and you with the grayness upon your years. What *colas* did she say, lass?"

I told him. "Aw, silly woman that she is, the *colas an t-Snaithnean!* madness and folly . . . Where is Morag?"

"In bed." I said this with truth in my eyes. God's forgiveness for that good lie!

"And it's time you were there also, and you too, Elspeth. Come now, no more of this foolishness. We have nothing to wait for. Why are we waiting here?"

At that moment Rory became worse than ever. I thought the poor blind beast would take some dreadful fit. Foam was on his jaws; his hair bristled. He had sidled forward, and crouched low. We saw him look again and again towards the blank space to his right, as if, blind though he was, he saw some one there, some one that gave him fear, but no longer a fierce terror. Nay, more than once we saw him swish his tail, and sniff as though longingly. But when he turned his head towards the door his sullen fury grew, and terror shook upon every limb. It was now that Gorromalt was speaking.

Suddenly the dog made a leap forward—a terrible bristling wolf he seemed to me, though no wolf had I ever seen, or imagined any more fearsome, than Rory, now.

He dashed himself against the door, snarling and mouthing, with his snout nosing the narrow slit at the bottom.

Aunt Elspeth and I shook with fear. My uncle was death-white, but stood strangely brooding. He had his right elbow upon his breast, and supported it with his left arm, while with his right hand he plucked at his beard.

"For sure," he said at last, with an effort to seem at ease; "for sure the dog is fëy with his age and his blindness." Then, more slowly still, "and if that were not so, it might look as though he had the fear on him, because of someone who strove to come in."

"It is Muireall," I whispered, scarce above my breath.

"No," said Aunt Elspeth, and the voice of her now was as though it had come out of the granite all about us, cold and hard as that. "No! Muireall is already in the room."

We both turned and looked at her. She sat quite still, on the chair betwixt the fire and the table. Her face was rigid, ghastly, but her eyes were large and wild.

A look first of fear, then almost of tenderness, came into her husband's face.

"Hush, Elspeth," he said, "that is foolishness."

"It is not foolishness, Archibald," she resumed in the same hard, unemotional voice, but with a terrible intensity. "Man, man, because ye are blind, is there no sight for those who can see?"

"There is no one here but ourselves."

But now Aunt Elspeth half rose, with supplicating arms:

"Muireall! Muireall! Muireall! O Muirnean, muirnean!"

I saw Archibald Campbell shaking as though he were a child and no strong man. "Will you be telling us this, Elspeth," he began in a hoarse voice—"will you be telling me this: if Muireall is in the room, beyond Rory there, who will be at the door? Who is trying to come in at the door?"

"It's a man. I do not know the man. It is a man. It is Death, maybe. I do not know the man. O Muirnean, mo muirnean!"

But now the great gaunt black dog—terrible in his seeing blindness he was to me—began again his savage snarling, his bristling insensate fury. He had ceased a moment while our voices filled the room, and had sidled a little way towards the place where Aunt Elspeth saw Muireall, whining low as he did so, and swishing his tail furtively along the whitewashed flagstones.

I know not what awful thing would have happened. It seemed to me that Death was coming to all of us.

But at that moment we all heard the sound of a galloping horse. There was a lull in the wind, and the rain lashed no more like a streaming whistling whip. Even Rory crouched silent, his nostrils quivering, his curled snout showing his fangs.

Gorromalt stood, listening intently.

"By the living God," he exclaimed suddenly, his eyes like a goaded bull's—"I know that horse. Only one horse runs like that at the gallop. 'Tis the grey stallion I sold three months ago to the man at Drumdoon—ay, ay, for the son of the man at Drumdoon! A horse to ride for the shooting—a good horse for the hills—that was what he wanted! Ay, ay, by God, a horse for the son of the man at Drumdoon! It's the grey stallion: no other horse in the Straths runs like that—d'ye hear? d'ye hear? Elspeth woman, is there hearing upon you for *that*? Hey, *tlot-a-tlot, tlot-a-tlot, tlot-tlot-tlot-tlot, tlot-a-tlot, tlot-tlot-tlot!* I tell you, woman, it's the grey stallion I sold to Drumdoon: it's that and no other! Ay, by the Sorrow, it's Drumdoon's son that will be riding here!"

By this time the horse was close by. We heard his hoofs clang above the flagstones round the well at the side of the house. Then there was a noise as of scattered stones, and a long scraping sound: then silence.

Gorromalt turned and put his hand to the door. There was murder in his eyes, for all the smile, a grim terrible smile, that had come to his lips.

Aunt Elspeth rose and ran to him, holding him back. The door shook. Rory the hound tore at the splinters at the base of the door, his fell again bristling, his snarling savagery horrible to hear. The pine-logs had fallen into a smouldering ash. The room was full of gloom, though the red sullen eye of the peat-glow stared through the semi-darkness.

"Don't be opening the door! Don't be opening the door!" she cried, in a thin screaming voice.

"What for no, woman? Let me go! Hell upon this dog—out o' the way, Rory—get back! Down wi' ye!"

"No, no, Archibald! Wait! Wait!"

Then a strange thing happened.

Rory ceased, sullenly listened, and then retreated, but no longer snarling and bristling.

Gorromalt suddenly staggered.

"Who touched me just now?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

No one answered.

"Who touched me just now? Who passed? Who slid past me?" His voice rose almost to a scream.

Then, shaking off his wife, he swung the door open.

There was no one there. Outside could be heard a strange sniffing and whinnying. It was the grey stallion.

Gorromalt strode across the threshold. I had time only to prevent Aunt Elspeth from falling against the lintel in a corner, but in a moment's interval I saw that the stallion was riderless.

"Archibald!" wailed his wife faintly out of her weakness. "Archibald, come back! Come back!"

But there was no need to call. Archibald Campbell was not the man to fly in the face of God. He knew that no mortal rider rode that horse to its death that night. Even before he closed the door we heard the rapid, sliding, catching gallop. The horse had gone: rider or riderless I know not.

He was ashy-grey. Suddenly he had grown quite still. He lifted his wife, and helped her to her own big leathern armchair at the other side of the ingle.

"Light the lamp, lass," he said to me, in a hushed strange voice. Then he stooped, and threw some small pine-logs on the peats, and stirred the blaze till it caught the dry splintered edges.

Rory, poor blind beast, came wearily and with a low whine to his side, and then lay down before the warm blaze.

"Bring the Book," he said to me.

I brought the great leather-bound Gaelic Bible, and laid it on his knees.

He placed his hand in it, and opened at random.

"With Himself be the word," he said.

"Is it Peace?" asked Aunt Elspeth in a tremulous whisper.

"It is Peace," he answered, his voice gentle, his face stern as a graven rock. And what he read was this, where his eye chanced upon as he opened at the place where is the Book of the Vision of Nahum the Elkoshite:

"What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make a full end."

After that there was a silence. Then he rose, and told me to go and lie down and sleep; for, on the morrow, after dawn, I was to go with him to where Muireall was.

I saw Aunt Elspeth rise and put her arms about him. They had peace. I went to my room, but after a brief while returned, and sat, in the quietness there, by the glowing peats, till dawn.

The greyness came at last; with it, the rain ceased. The wind still soughed and wailed among the corries and upon the rocky braes; with low moans sighing along the flanks of the near hills, and above the stony water-course where the Gorrormalt surged with swirling foam and loud and louder tumult.

My eyes had closed in my weariness, when I heard Rory give a low growl, followed by a contented whimper. Almost at the same moment the door opened. I looked up, startled.

It was Morag.

She was so white, it is scarce to be wondered at that I took her at first for a wraith. Then I saw how drenched she was, chilled to the bone too. She did not speak as I led her in, and made her stand before the fire, while I took off her soaked dress and shoes. In silence she made all the necessary changes, and in silence drank the tea I brewed for her.

"Come to my room with me," she whispered, as with quiet feet we crossed the stone flags and went up the wooden stair that led to her room.

When she was in bed she bade me put out the light and lie down beside her. Still silent, we lay there in the darkness, for at that side of the house the hill-gloom prevailed, and moreover the blind was down-drawn. I thought the weary moaning of the wind would make my very heart sob.

Then, suddenly, Morag put her arms about me, and the tears streamed warm about my neck.

"Hush, Morag-aghray, hush, mo-rùn," I whispered in her ear. "Tell me what it is, dear! Tell me what it is!"

"Oh, and I loved him so! I loved him."

"I know it, dear; I knew it all along."

I thought her sobs would never cease till her heart was broken, so I questioned her again.

"Yes," she said, gaspingly, "yes, I loved him when Muireall and I were in the South together. I met him a month or more before ever she saw him. He loved me, and I promised to marry him; but I would not go away with him, as he wished: for he said his father would never agree. And then he was angry, and we quarrelled. And I—Oh! I was glad too, for I did not wish to marry an Englishman—or to live in a dreary city; but . . . but . . . and

then he and Muireall met, and he gave all his thought to her ; and she, her love to him."

"And now?"

"Now? . . . *Now* Muireall is dead."

"Dead? O Morag, *dead*? O poor Muireall that we loved so! But did you see her? was she alive when you reached her?"

"No; but she was alone. And now, listen. Here is a thing I have to tell you. When Ealasaid Cameron, that was my mother's mother, was a girl, she had a cruel sorrow. She had two sisters whom she loved with all her heart. They were twins, Silis and Morag. One day an English officer at Fort William took Silis away with him as his wife; but when her child was heavy within her she discovered that she was no wife, for the man was already wedded to a woman in the south. She left him that night. It was bitter weather, and midwinter. She reached home through a wild snowdrift. It killed her; but before she died she said to Morag, 'He has killed me and the child.' And Morag understood. So it was that before any wind of spring blew upon that snow, the man was dead."

When Morag stopped here, and said no more, I did not at first realize what she meant to tell me. Then it flashed upon me.

"O Morag, Morag!" I exclaimed, terrified. "But, Morag, you do not . . . you will not. . . ."

"*Will* not!" she repeated, with a strange catch in her voice.

"Listen," she resumed suddenly after a long, strained silence. "While I lay beside my darling Muireall, weeping and moaning over her, and she so fair, with such silence where the laughter had always been, I heard the door open. I looked up. It was Jasper Morgan.

"'You are too late,' I said. I stared at the man who had brought her, and me, this sorrow. There was no light about him at all, as I had always thought. He was only a man as other men are, but with a cold selfish heart and loveless eyes.

"'She sent for me to come back to her,' he answered, though I saw his face grow ashy-grey as he looked at Muireall and saw that she was dead.

"'She is dead, Jasper Morgan.'

"'Dead . . . Dead?'

"'Ay, dead. It is upon you, her death. Her you have slain, as though with your sword that you carry: her, and the child she bore within her, and that was yours.'

"At that he bit his lip till the blood came.

“‘It is a lie,’ he cried. ‘It is a lie, Morag. If she said that thing, she lied.’

“I laughed.

“‘Why do you laugh, Morag?’ he asked, in a swift anger.

“Once more I laughed.

“‘Why do you laugh like that, girl?’

“But I did not answer. ‘Come,’ I said, ‘come with me. I have something to say to you. You can do no good here now. She has taken poison, because of the shame and the sorrow.’

“‘Poison!’ he cried, in horror; and also, I could see in the poor cowardly mind of him, in a sudden sick fear.

“But when I rose to leave the room he made ready to follow me. I kissed Muireall for the last time. The man approached, as though to do likewise. I lifted my riding-whip. He bowed his head, with a deep flush on his face, and came out behind me.

“I told the inn-folk that my father would be over in the morning. Then I rode slowly away. Jasper Morgan followed on his horse, a grey stallion that Muireall and I had often ridden, for he was from Teenabrae farm.

“When we left the village it was into a deep darkness. The rain and the wind made the way almost impassable at times. But at last we came to the ford. The water was in spate, and the rushing sound terrified my horse. I dismounted, and fastened Gealcas to a tree. The man did the same.

“‘What is it, Morag?’ he asked in a quiet steady voice—‘Death?’

“‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Death.’

“Then he suddenly fell forward, and snatched my hand, and begged me to forgive him, swearing that he had loved me and me only, and imploring me to believe him, to love him, to . . . Ah, the *hound!*

“But all I said was this:

“‘Jasper Morgan, soon or late I will kill you, because of this cruel wrong you did to her. But there is one way: best for *her* . . . best for *me* . . . best for *you*.’

“‘What is that?’ he said hoarsely, though I think he knew now. The roar of the Gorrormalt Water filled the night.

“‘There is one way. It is the only way . . . *Go!*’

“He gave a deep quavering sigh. Then without a word he turned, and walked straight into the darkness.”

Morag paused here. Then, in answer to my frightened whisper, added simply:

"They will find his body in the shallows, down by Drumdoon. The spate will carry it there."

After that we lay in silence. The rain had begun to fall again, and slid with a soft stealthy sound athwart the window. A dull light grew indiscernibly into the room. Then we heard someone move downstairs. In the yard, Angus, the stableman, began to pump water. A cow lowed, and the clattering of hens was audible.

I moved gently from Morag's side. As I rose, Maisie passed beneath the window on her way to the byre. As her wont was, poor wild wildered lass, she was singing fitfully. It was the same ballad again. But we heard a single verse only.

"For I have killed a man," she said,
"A better man than you to wed :
I slew him when he clasped my head,
And now he sleepeth with the dead."

Then the voice was lost in the byre, and in the sweet familiar lowing of the kine. The new day was come.

FIONA MACLEOD.