

An Isle in the Water

Katharine Tynan

1896

•

A Prodigal Son

It was from some of these Protestant ladies the suggestion came that Mick should go to America under some precious emigration scheme. They are always, with their mistaken philanthropy, drafting away the boys and girls from Ireland, to cast them, human wreckage, in the streets of New York ; always taking away the young life from the sweet glens over which the chapel bell sends its shepherding voice, and casting it away in noisome places, while at home the aged folk go down alone the path to the grave.

Now we always thought that Mrs. Sheehy must have suggested Mick as an emigrant, for he was distinctly not eligible. But it was very easy to puff up poor Mick's mind with pictures of America as a Tom Tiddler's ground, and the mother did this in private, while in public she wrung her hands over the wilful boy that would go and leave her lonesome in her old age. Pretty soon the matter was settled, and Mick went about as vain as any young recruit when he has taken the Queen's shilling and donned the scarlet, and has not yet realised that he has been a fine fat goose for the fox-sergeant's plucking.

But if Mick was full of the spirit of adventure, and looked forward to that spring Wednesday when he should leave for Queenstown, his mother made up for his heartless joy by her lugubriousness. As the time drew near she would buttonhole all and sundry whom she could catch to pour out her sorrows. The trailing gown and ragged lace shawl became a danger signal which we would all flee from, as it were not sprung upon us too suddenly. We had a shrewd suspicion that the tears Mrs. Sheehy shed so freely were of the variety known as crocodile. Rumour had it that Mick once out of the way she was to be accommodated comfortably for life as a lodgekeeper to one of those emigrating ladies. Sometimes she used to follow us to our very doors to weep, and on such occasions would be so overcome with grief that it took a little whisky and water and the gift of an old dress or some broken victuals to prepare her for the road again.

On the Tuesday of the week Mick was to start he made a farewell progress round all the houses of the neighbourhood. We were called into the big farmhouse kitchen about five of the afternoon to bid him good-bye. Mick sat forward on the edge of his chair, thrusting now and then his knuckles into his eyes, like a big child, and trying to wink away his tears. We all did our best to console him, and after a time from being very sad he grew rather uproariously gay. Mick was no penman, but for all that he made the wildest promises about writing, and as for the gifts he was to send us, the place should be indeed a Tom Tiddler's ground if he were to fulfil his rash promises. Meanwhile we all pressed our parting gifts on him ; some took the form of money, others were useful or beneficial, as we judged it. Mick added everything to the small pack he was carrying, which had indeed already swollen since he left home, and was likely to be considerably more swollen by the time he had concluded his round.

Mick had got over the parting with his mother. The emigrants' train started in the small hours, and the emigrants were to rendezvous at a common lodging-house close by the big terminus. We inquired about poor Mrs. Sheehy with feeling. Mick responded with a return of

tears that he'd left her screeching for bare life and tearing her hair out in handfuls. The memory caused Mick such remorse at leaving her that we hastened to distract his mind to his fine prospects once more.

He delayed so long over his farewells to us that we began to fear he'd never catch up with the other emigrants, for the road to the city was studded with the abodes of Mick's friends, whom he had yet to call upon. However, at last he really said good-bye, and we accompanied him in a group to the gate of the farmyard, from which, with a last distracted wave of his hands, the poor fellow set off, running, as if he could not trust himself to look back, along the field-path. It was a dewy May evening after rain, and the hawthorn was all in bloom, and the leaves shaking out their crumpled flags of tender green. The blackbird was singing as he only sings after rain, and the fields were covered with the gold and silver dust of buttercup and daisy. It was sad to see the poor fellow going away at such a time, and from a place where every one knew and was kind to him, to an unknown world that might be very cruel. Once again as we watched him we anathematised the emigration which has so steadily been bleeding the veins of our poor country.

We all thought of Mick the next morning, and imagined him on the various stages of his journey to Queenstown, and the big liner. For a week or so we did not see Mrs. Sheehy, but heard piteous accounts of her prostration. The poor woman seemed incapable of taking comfort. Report said that she could neither eat nor drink, so great was her grief. We felt rather ashamed of our former judgments of her, and were very full of good resolutions as to our future treatment of her. Only Mary, our maid, disbelieved in this excessive grief; but then Mary is the most profound cynic I have ever known, and we always discount her judgments.

Anyhow, when Mrs. Sheehy reappeared in our kitchen she looked more wizened, yellow, and dishevelled than ever, and at the mention of Mick's name she rocked herself to and fro in such paroxysms of grief that we were quite alarmed. As for the benevolent ladies interested in the schemes of emigration, their eyes would have been rudely opened if they could have heard Mrs. Sheehy's denunciations of them. She called them the hard-hearted ould maids who had robbed her of her one child, who had persecuted her boy—her innocent child, and driven him out in the cold world, who had left her to go down a lone woman to the grave. Nor was this all, for she was an adept at eloquent Irish curses, and she sprinkled them generously on the devoted heads of the ladies aforesaid. It was really rather fine to see Mrs. Sheehy in this tragic mood, and we were all touched and impressed by her. We comforted her with the suggestion that a letter from Mick was nearly due, and with assurances, which we scarcely felt, that Mick was bound to do well in America and prove a credit to her; and we finally got rid of her, and were rejoiced to see her going off, with her turned-up skirt full as usual of heterogeneous offerings.

Well, a few days after this, some one brought us the surprising story that Mick had returned or was on the way to return. One of the carters had given him a lift on the first stage of his journey from Dublin, and had left him by his own request at one of the houses where he had had such a sorrowful parting a little while before. The man had told Mick of his mother's grief, a bit of intelligence which somewhat dashed the radiant spirits with which he was returning home. However, he cheered up immediately: 'Tell th' ould woman,' he said, 'that I wasn't such a villain as to leave her at all, at all, an' that I'll be home by evenin'. She'll be havin' a bit o' bacon in the pot to welcome me.' The man told us this with a dry grin, and added, 'Tis meself wouldn't like to be afther bringin' the poor ould woman the good news. It might be too much joy for the crathur to bear.' This ironic speech revived all our doubts of Mrs. Sheehy.

Mick took our house on the way across the fields to his mother's cottage. We received him cordially, though with less empressement than when we had parted from him, for now we were pretty sure of seeing Mick often during the years of our natural lives. We too told him of his mother's excessive grief, as much, perhaps, with a selfish design of hastening him on his way as anything else, for we had our misgivings about Mick's reception.

There were plenty of people to tell us of the prodigal's welcome. The village had buzzed all day with the dramatic sensation of Mick's return, but no one had told Mrs. Sheehy—though every one was on tiptoe for the hour of Mick's arrival. He came about six in the evening, and having passed through the village was escorted by a band of the curious towards his mother's cottage.

Mrs. Sheehy lives in a by-road. On one side are the woods, on the other the fields, and at this hour of the May evening the woods were full of golden aisles of glory. Now Mrs. Sheehy had come out of her house to give a bit to the pig, when she saw a group of people advancing towards her down the sunshine and shadow of the road. She shaded her eyes and looked that way. For a minute or two she could not make out the advancing figures, but from one in the midst broke a yell, a too-familiar yell, for who in the world but Mick could make such a sound? Then her prodigal son dashed from the midst of the throng and flew to her with his arms spread wide.

Mrs. Sheehy seemed taken with a genuine faintness. She dropped the 'piggin,'—the little one-handled tub in which she was carrying the rentpayer's mess of greens,—and fell back against the wall. The spectators, and it seemed the whole village had turned out, came stealing in Mick's wake. They were safe from Mrs. Sheehy's dreaded tongue, for the lady had no eyes for them. As soon as she realised that it was Mick, really her son, come back to her, she burst into a torrent of abuse, the like of which has never been equalled in our country. The listeners could give no idea of it : it was too continuous and too eloquent. It included not only Mick, 'the villain, the thief of the world, the base unnatural deceiver,' but ourselves, and all to whom Mick had paid those farewell visits. Mick heard her with a grin, and when she had exhausted herself she suddenly clutched him by his mop-head, dragged him indoors, and banged the door to.

She had apprehended the true state of the case. The potations at some houses, the gifts at others, had been the causes of the failure of Mick as an emigrant. When his round of visits was concluded he had slept comfortably in a hay-stack till long after the hour when his fellow emigrants were starting from Kingsbridge. The next morning he had gaily set out for 'a bit of a spree' in Dublin, and having sold his passage ticket and his little kit, had managed, with the proceeds and our gifts, to make the spree last a fortnight. For a little while we deemed it expedient to avoid passing by Mrs. Sheehy's door, though Mick assured us that it was 'the joy of the crathur had taken her wits from her, so that she didn't rightly know what she was saying.'

There was one more attempt made to emigrate Mick, but it was futile, Mick declaring that 'he'd deserve any misfortune, so he would, if he was ever to turn his back on the old woman again.' Mrs. Sheehy has forgiven us our innocent share in keeping Mick at home with her. The mother and son still live together, with varying times, just as the working mood is on or off Mick. I believe his favourite relaxation of an evening, when he stays at home, is to discover in the wood embers the treasures which would have fallen to him if his love for his mother hadn't kept him from expatriating himself. The Hon. Miss Ellersby's vacant gate-lodge has been filled up by Kitty Keegan, who is Mrs. Sheehy's special aversion out of all the world.

The Fields of My Childhood

They lie far away, gray with the mists of memory, under a veil of distance, half-silver, half-gold, like the gossamer, so far that they might never have been save only in dreams. They are not nearly so real as the Eastern world of the stories I read yesterday, but I know where they lie—common fields nowadays, and seldom visited. Yet, there was a child once who knew every inch of them as well as the ant her anthill, or the silvery minnow her brown well under the stone cover, to which one descends by ancient water-stained steps.

The fields are there, but their face somewhat changed, as other things are changed. We were little ones when we came to live among them, in a thatched house full of little nests of rooms, the walls of which were run over by flowery trellises that made them country-like even by candle-light. Of candle-light I have not much memory, for we went to bed in the gloaming, when the long, long day had burned itself out and the skies were washed with palest green that held the evening star ; and we slept dreamlessly till the golden day shot through the chinks of the shutters, and we leapt to life again with a child's zest for living. At the back of the house there was an overgrown orchard, a dim, delicious place where the gnarled boughs made a roof against heaven. It was our adventure, time and again, to escape through our windows and wash our feet in the May dew before we were discovered. One whole summer, indeed, these revels were hindered by a bull which was pastured on the lush herbage. But how entrancing it was to hear him roar at night, close by our bed's head, or to see his great shadow cross the chink of moonlight in the shutter ! Sometimes he ate the rose-bushes that wreathed our window, and, rubbing his gigantic flanks against the house-wall, bellowed, while we shook in bed in delicious tremors, and imagined our cosy nest a tent in the African desert, with lions roaring outside. I remember the rooms so well : the chilly parlour, only used when we had grown-up visitors, for we were there in charge of a nurse ; the red-tiled kitchen, with its settle and its little windows opening inward ; the door that gave on a grass-grown approach ; and the stone seat outside, where we sat to shell peas, or made ' plays ' with broken bits of crockery and the shreds of shining tin pared by the travelling tinker when he mended the porringers. I remember the very cups and saucers from which we drank our rare draughts of tea—delicate china, with sea-shells on it in tones of gray, the varied shapes of which gave us ever-new interest.

As I look back, I can never see that house in unwinking daylight, though it was perpetual summer then, and never a rainy day. Rooms and passages are always dim with a subdued green light, the reflection, I suppose, through the narrow windows wreathed with verdure, and from the grass and the plaited apple-boughs. But the spirit of improvement has laid all waste, has thrown the wee rooms into ample ones, has changed the narrow windows for bays and oriels, has thinned the apple-trees for the sake of the grass. There was once a pond, long and green, with a little island in the midst, where a water-hen had her nest. I always thought of it as the pond in Hans Andersen's Ugly Ducklings and never watched the ducks paddling among the reeds that I did not look to the sky to see the wild geese, that were contemptuously friendly with the poor hero, flecking the pearl-strewn blue. The pond is filled up now with the macadam of a model farmyard. Iron and stone have replaced the tumble-down yellow sheds, where we drank sheep's milk in a gloom powdered with sun-rays ; the two shrubberies have gone, and the hedge of wild roses that linked the trees in the approach to the house. Naught remains save the thatched roof, many feet deep, the green porch over the hall door, the stone seat round the streaky apple-tree at the garden gate, and the garden itself, where the largest lilies I have ever seen stand in the sun, and the apple-trees are in the garden-beds, the holly-hocks elbow the gooseberries, and the violets push out their little clumps in the celery-bed.

But the fields. It is only to the ignorant all fields are the same ; as there are some who see no individualities in animals because they have no heart for them. Here and there hedges have been levelled and dykes filled, and now their places are marked by a long dimple in the land's face. The well in the midst of one has been filled up, despite the warning of an old mountain farmer that ill-luck would surely follow whosoever demolished the fairy well. Over it grew a clump of briar and thorn-trees, where one found the largest, juiciest blackberries ; that too is gone, but, practically, the fields remain the same. There is the Ten Acre field, stretching so far as to be weirdly lonely at the very far end. Every part of it was distinct. You turned to the left as you entered by a heavy hedge of wild-rose and blackberry. There the wild convolvulus blew its white trumpet gloriously and violets ran over the bank under the green veil, and stellaria and speedwell made in May a mimic heaven. I remember a meadow there, and yet again a potato-digging, where we picked our own potatoes for dinner and grew sun-burnt as the brown men and women who required so many cans of well-water to drink at their work. Where the hedge curved there was a little passage, through which the dyke-water flowed into the next field. It was delightful to set little boats of leaf and grass upon the stream, and to see them carried gaily by the current down that arcade of green light. Some of the inquisitive ones waded after them, and emerged wet and muddy in the next field. I preferred to keep the mystery of the place, and to believe it went a long, long way. For half the length of the field the water flowed over long grass that lay face downward in it. To see it you had to lift : the grass and the meadow flowers. Once we were startled there in a summer dusk before the hay was cut, when all the corncrakes were crying out that summer was in the land. As we threaded the meadow aisles, a heavy, dark body leapt from its lair and into the dyke. It was a badger, we learnt afterwards, and its presence there gave the place an attractive fear-someness. Half-way down, where a boundary hedge had once made two fields of the Ten Acres, the low hedge changed to a tall wall of stately thorn trees. Below their feet the stream ran, amber, pellucid, over a line of transformed pebbles. By this we used to lie for hours, watching the silver-scaled minnows as they sailed on. At the far end there was watercress, and over the hedge a strange field, good for mushrooms, but which bore with us a somewhat uncanny reputation.

Across it you saw the gray house-chimneys of the lonely house reputed to be haunted. Opposite its door stood an old fort on a little hill, a noted resort of the fairies. Any summer gloaming at all, you might see their hundreds of little lamps threading a fantastic measure in and out on the rath. I never heard that any one saw more of them than those lights, which floated away if any were bold enough to approach them, like glorified balls of that thistle-down of which children divine what's o'clock.

At the other side of the Ten Acres was a fantastic corner of grass, which was always a miniature meadow. There swung the scarlet and black butterflies which have flown into Fairyland, and there the corncrake built her nest in the grass. It was a famous corner for bird's-nesting, which with us took no crueller form than liking to part the thick leaves to peep at the pretty, perturbed mother-thrush on her clutch. Sometimes we peeped too often, and she flew away and left the eggs cold. We saw the world from that corner, for one could see through the hedge on to the road by lying low where the roots of the hedge-row made a thinness. We should not have cared about this if it were not that we could look, unseen ourselves, at the infrequent passer-by, for the hedge grew luxuriantly. Further down it became partly a clay bank, and there on the coarse grass used to hang snail-shells of all sizes, and, as I remember them, of shining gold and silver. The inhabitant was the drawback to all that beauty, yet when we found an empty house, it was cold, dull, and with the sheen vanished.

Across the road was the moat-field, the great fascination of which was in the wild hill that gave it its name. What the moat originally was I know not. I think, now, it must have been a gravel-hill, for it was full of deep gashes, of pits and quarries, run over by briar, alight with furze-bushes. It must have been long disused, for the hedge that was set around it—to keep the cattle out, perhaps—was tall and sturdy, and grew up boldly towards the trees that studded it at intervals. There was no other entry to it except by gaps we made in the close hedge, and, wriggling through these, we climbed among briars and all kinds of vegetation that made a miniature jungle overhead. Near the top we emerged on stunted grass, with the wide sky over us, and before us the champaign country stretching to the plains of Meath, and the smoke of the city, and the misty sea. Southwards there were the eternal hills which grow so dear to one, yet never so intimate that they have not fresh exquisite surprises in store. We threaded the moat by paths between the furze, on the golden honey-hives of which fluttered moths like blue turquoise. The dragon-fly was there, and the lady-bird and little beetles in emerald coats of mail. And over that the lark soared in a wide field of air to hail God at His own very gates. Bitter little sloes grew on the moat, and blackberries in their season ; and if you had descended into one of the many cups of the place, even long before the sun had begun to slant, you liked to shout to your companions and be answered cheerily from the human world. The moat had an uncanniness of its own ; it was haunted by leaping fires that overran it and left no trace. You might see it afar, suffused by a dull glare, any dim summer night. So have I myself beheld it when I have crept through the dews on a nocturnal expedition : and though one of the commonplace suggested that it might have been the new moon rising scarlet behind the luxuriant vegetation of the moat, that was in the unimaginative next day, and not when we discussed the marvel in the scented darkness that comes between summer eve and dawn.

Then there was the well-field, where a little stream that fed the well clattered over pebbles, made leaps so sudden down tiny inclines that we called the commotion a waterfall, and widened under a willow-tree into a pool, brown and still, where, tradition said, had once been seen a trout. For sake of this glorious memory we fished long with squirming worms and a pin, but caught not even the silliest little minnow. This small game we used to bag, by the way, at will, by simply lowering a can into the green depths of the well, where there was always a tiny silver fin a-sailing. Once we kept a pair three days in the water-jug, and finally restored them to their emerald dark. The well-field was in part marshy and ended in a rushy place, where water-cresses grew thick, and a little bridge led into the neighbour's fields. There we found yellow iris, and the purple bee orchis, and fox-gloves.

Hard by was Nano's Field, which we affected only in the autumn, for then we gathered crab-apples, of a yellow and pink, most delightful to the eye. And also the particular variety of blackberry which ripens first, and is large and of irregular shape, but, to the common blackberry, what purple grapes are to the thin, green variety. And again, there was the front lawn, where the quicken-berry hung in drooping scarlet clusters above us, as we sat on a knoll, and a sea of gold and white washed about us in May. But the fields make me garrulous, and if I were to go on they that never tired the children might weary the grown listener. Said I not they were seldom visited ? Yet their enchantment is still there for happy generations unborn. The children and the fields and the birds we have always with us. I would that for every child there might be the fields, to make long after a dream of green beauty, though the world has grown arid. Because the dream seems so sweet to me I have gossiped of it, but have not named half its delicate delights, nor some of the great ones : as the romps in the hay fields, the voyage of discovery after hens' nests, the mysteries of that double hedge that is the orchard boundary, and the hidden places in gnarled boughs, where you perched among the secrets of the birds and the leaves, and saw the crescent moon through a tender veil of enchantment while yet the orange of the sunset was in the west.

The Sea's Dead

In Achill it was dreary wet weather—one of innumerable wet summers that blight the potatoes and blacken the hay and mildew the few oats and rot the poor cabin roofs. The air smoked all day with rain mixed with the fine salt spray from the ocean. Out of doors everything shivered and was disconsolate. Only the bog prospered, basking its length in water, and mirroring Croghan and Slievemore with the smoky clouds incessantly wreathing about their foreheads, or drifting like ragged wisps of muslin down their sides to the clustering cabins more desolate than a deserted nest. Inland from the sheer ocean cliffs the place seemed all bog ; the little bits of earth the people had reclaimed were washed back into the bog, the gray bents and rimy grasses that alone flourished drank their fill of the water, and were glad. There was a grief and trouble on all the Island. Scarce a cabin in the queer straggling villages but had desolation sitting by its hearth. It was only a few weeks ago that the hooker had capsized crossing to Westport, and the famine that is always stalking ghost-like in Achill was forgotten in the contemplation of new graves. The Island was full of widows and orphans and bereaved old people ; there was scarce a window sill in Achill by which the banshee had not cried. Where all were in trouble there were few to go about with comfort. Moya Lavelle shut herself up in the cabin her husband Patrick had built, and dreed her weird alone. Of all the boys who had gone down with the hooker none was finer than Patrick Lavelle. He was brown and handsome, broad-shouldered and clever, and he had the good-humoured smile and the kindly word where the people are normally taciturn and unsmiling. The Island girls were dis-appointed when Patrick brought a wife from the mainland, and Moya never tried to make friends with them. She was something of a mystery to the Achill people, this small moony creature, with her silver fair hair, and strange light eyes, the colour of spilt milk. She was as small as a child, but had the gravity of a woman. She loved the sea with a love unusual in Achill, where the sea is to many a ravening monster that has exacted in return for its hauls of fish the life of husband and son. Patrick Lavelle had built for her a snug cabin in a sheltered ravine. A little beach ran down in front of it where he could haul up his boat. The cabin was built strongly, as it had need to be, for often of a winter night the waves tore against its little windows.

Moya loved the fury of the elements, and when the winter storms drove the Atlantic up the ravine with a loud bellowing, she stirred in sleep on her husband's shoulder, and smiled as they say children smile in sleep when an angel leans over them. Higher still, on a spur of rock, Patrick Lavelle had laid the clay for his potatoes. He had carried it on his shoulders, every clod, and Moya had gathered the seaweed to fertilise it. She had her small garden there, too, of sea-pinks and the like, which rather encouraged the Islanders in their opinion of her strangeness. In Achill the struggle for life is too keen to admit of any love for mere beauty.

However, Patrick Lavelle was quite satisfied with his little wife. When he came home from the fishing he found his cabin more comfortable than is often the case in Achill. They had no child, but Moya never seemed to miss a child's head at her breast. During the hours of his absence at the fishing she seemed to find the sea sufficient company. She was always roaming along the cliffs, gazing down as with a fearful fascination along the black sides to where the waves churned hundreds of feet below. For company she had only the seagulls and the bald eagle that screamed far over her head ; but she was quite happy as she roamed hither and thither, gathering the coloured seaweeds out of the clefts of the rocks, and crooning an old song softly to herself, as a child might do.

But that was all over and gone, and Moya was a widow. She had nothing warm and human at all, now that brave protecting tenderness was gone from her. No one came to the little cabin in the ravine where Moya sat and moaned, and stretched her arms all day for the dear brown head she had last seen stained with the salt water and matted with the seaweeds. At night she went out, and wandered moon-struck by the black cliffs, and cried out for Patrick, while the shrilling gusts of wind blew her pale hair about her, and scourged her fevered face with the sea salt and the sharp hail.

One night a great wave broke over Achill. None had seen it coming, with great crawling leaps like a serpent, but at dead of night it leaped the land, and hissed on the cottage hearths and weltered gray about the mud floors. The next day broke on ruin in Achill. The bits of fields were washed away, the little mountain sheep were drowned, the cabins were flung in ruined heaps ; but the day was fair and sunny, as if the elements were tired of the havoc they had wrought and were minded to be in a good humour. There was not a boat on the Island but had been battered and torn by the rocks. People had to take their heads out of their hands, and stand up from their brooding, or this wanton mischief would cost them their dear lives, for the poor resources of the Island had given out, and the Islanders were in grips with starvation.

No one thought of Moya Lavelle in her lonely cabin in the ravine. None knew of the feverish vigils in those wild nights. But a day or two later the sea washed her on a stretch of beach to the very doors of a few straggling cabins dotted here and there beyond the irregular village. She had been carried out to sea that night, but the sea, though it had snatched her to itself, had not battered and bruised her. She lay there, indeed, like that blessed Restituta, whom, for her faith, the tyrant sent bound on a rotting hulk, with the outward tide from Carthage, to die on the untracked ocean. She lay like a child smiling in dreams, all her long silver hair about her, and her wide eyes gazing with no such horror, as of one who meets a violent death.

Those who found her so wept to behold her.

They carried her to her cottage in the ravine, and waked her. Even in Achill they omit no funeral ceremony. They dressed her in white and put a cross in her hand, and about her face on the pillow they set the sea-pinks from her little garden, and some of the coloured seaweeds she had loved to gather. They lit candles at her head and feet, and the women watched with her all day, and at night the men came in, and they talked and told stories, subdued stories and ghostly, of the banshee and the death-watch, and wraiths of them gone that rise from the sea to warn fishermen of approaching death. Gaiety there was none : the Islanders had no heart for gaiety : but the pipes and tobacco were there, and the plate of snuff, and the jar of poteen to lift up the heavy hearts. And Moya lay like an image wrought of silver, her lids kept down by coins over her blue eyes.

She had lain so two nights, nights of starlit calm. On the fourth day they were to bury her beside Patrick Lavelle in his narrow house, and the little bridal cabin would be abandoned, and presently would rot to ruins. The third night had come, overcast with heavy clouds. The group gathered in the death chamber was more silent than before. Some had sat up the two nights, and were now dazed with sleep. By the wall the old women nodded over their beads, and a group of men talked quietly at the bed-head where Moya lay illumined by the splendour of the four candles all shining on her white garments.

Suddenly in the quietness there came a roar of wind. It did not come freshening from afar off, but seemed to waken suddenly in the ravine and cry about the house. The folk sprang to their feet startled, and the eyes of many turned towards the little dark window, expecting to

see wild eyes and a pale face set in black hair gazing in. Some who were nearest saw in the half-light—for it was whitening towards day—a wall of gray water travelling up the ravine. Before they could cry a warning it had encompassed the house, had driven door and window before it, and the living and the dead were in the sea.

The wave retreated harmlessly, and in a few minutes the frightened folk were on their feet amid the wreck of stools and tables floating. The wave that had beaten them to earth had extinguished the lights. When they stumbled to their feet and got the water out of their eyes the dim dawn was in the room. They were too scared for a few minutes to think of the dead. When they recovered and turned towards the bed there was a simultaneous loud cry. Moya Lavelle was gone. The wave had carried her away, and never more was there tale or tidings of her body.

Achill people said she belonged to the sea, and the sea had claimed her. They remembered Patrick Lavelle's silence as to where he had found her. They remembered a thousand unearthly ways in her ; and which of them had ever seen her pray.

They pray well in Achill, having a sure hold on that heavenly country which is to atone for the cruelty and sorrow of this. In process of time they will come to think of her as a mermaid, poor little Moya. She had loved her husband at least with a warm human love. But his open grave was filled after they had given up hoping that the sea would again give her up, and the place by Patrick Lavelle's side remains for ever empty.

An Isle in the Water (1896)

Author: Katharine Tynan

Publisher: Macmillan & Co.

Year: 1896

Language: English

Digitizing sponsor: Google

Book from the collections of: University of Michigan

Collection: americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/anisleinwater00tynagoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org

May 19 2013