# CLASSICS TO GO THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA



BRAM STOKER

### The Mystery of the Sea

#### **Bram Stoker**

# TO DAISY GILBEY RIVIERE OF THE THIRD GENERATION OF LOVING AND LOYAL FRIENDS

Seek togen Lengtheries signaly.

Respectively Lengtheries signally so the Length Lengt

"To win the mystery o' the sea,
"An' learn the secrets that there be,
"Gather in ane these weirds three:

"A gowden moon on a flowin' tide;
"An' Lammas floods for the spell to bide;
"An' a gowden mon wi death for his bride."

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Vagabonds, Beggers, &c.

allowance og benefite of Elergie og fanc. Giegie tuarie.

And toj-the tull erpielling what perfon ite and perfons hall bee entended within this branch to be rogeg, bagabonds, and Gur- Rosea bie beggers, to haue and receiue the puniffment afgielagd, fei the lage lewbe maner of life: it is nowe publiched, beelared and ter feith by the autholitie of this pretent parliament, that all and querie luch perlen and perlong, that be of biter them-Celues to bee piectours or procuratours, Procidisgoing in er about gify countrey er countreis within this tealme without fuftiffent autheinte beriues frem, of baber our lousreigne ladie the queene: and all other idle Tois poiperfons going about in any countrey of the find tayde realme, bung fubtill, craftie, and bit lawfull games of playes, and tome of them same faining themfelues to have knowledge in ders. Philnomie, Palmefrie et orbet abuled fci- Dipue. ences, wherey they beare & people in hand astethey can tell their dellinies, deaths, atortunes, and fuel other the fantolicall imaginations: and all and eustle perloft operlong, being whole and mightie in bouie, and able to labour, hading het land er maiher, nor bang any lawfull marchandife, traft, or milterie, whereby he or the might get his or ber liuing, and can ging no rec-Adning how he or the dooth lawfulle get

#### CHAPTER I SECOND SIGHT

I had just arrived at Cruden Bay on my annual visit, and after a late breakfast was sitting on the low wall which was a continuation of the escarpment of the bridge over the Water of Cruden. Opposite to me, across the road and standing under the only little clump of trees in the place was a tall, gaunt old woman, who kept looking at me intently. As I sat, a little group, consisting of a man and two women, went by. I found my eyes follow them, for it seemed to me after they had passed me that the two women walked together and the man alone in front carrying on his shoulder a little black box—a coffin. I shuddered as I thought, but a moment later I saw all three abreast just as they had been. The old woman was now looking at me with eyes that blazed. She came across the road and said to me without preface:

"What saw ye then, that yer e'en looked so awed?" I did not like to tell her so I did not answer. Her great eyes were fixed keenly upon me, seeming to look me through and through. I felt that I grew quite red, whereupon she said, apparently to herself: "I thocht so! Even I did not see that which he saw."

"How do you mean?" I queried. She answered ambiguously: "Wait! Ye shall perhaps know before this hour to-morrow!"

Her answer interested me and I tried to get her to say more; but she would not. She moved away with a grand stately movement that seemed to become her great gaunt form.

After dinner whilst I was sitting in front of the hotel, there was a great commotion in the village; much running to and fro of men and women with sad mien. On questioning them I

found that a child had been drowned in the little harbour below. Just then a woman and a man, the same that had passed the bridge earlier in the day, ran by with wild looks. One of the bystanders looked after them pityingly as he said:

"Puir souls. It's a sad home-comin' for them the nicht."

"Who are they?" I asked. The man took off his cap reverently as he answered:

"The father and mother of the child that was drowned!" As he spoke I looked round as though some one had called me.

There stood the gaunt woman with a look of triumph on her face.

\* \* \* \* \*

The curved shore of Cruden Bay, Aberdeenshire, is backed by a waste of sandhills in whose hollows seagrass and moss and wild violets, together with the pretty "grass of Parnassus" form a green carpet. The surface of the hills is held together by bent-grass and is eternally shifting as the wind takes the fine sand and drifts it to and fro. All behind is green, from the meadows that mark the southern edge of the bay to the swelling uplands that stretch away and away far in the distance, till the blue mist of the mountains at Braemar sets a kind of barrier. In the centre of the bay the highest point of the land that runs downward to the sea looks like a miniature hill known as the Hawklaw; from this point onward to the extreme south, the land runs high with a gentle trend downwards.

Cruden sands are wide and firm and the sea runs out a considerable distance. When there is a storm with the wind on shore the whole bay is a mass of leaping waves and broken water that threatens every instant to annihilate the stake-nets which stretch out here and there along the shore. More than a few vessels have been lost on these wide stretching sands, and it was perhaps the roaring of the shallow seas and the terror which they inspired which sent

the crews to the spirit room and the bodies of those of them which came to shore later on, to the churchyard on the hill.

If Cruden Bay is to be taken figuratively as a mouth, with the sand hills for soft palate, and the green Hawklaw as the tongue, the rocks which work the extremities are its teeth. To the north the rocks of red granite rise jagged and broken. To the south, a mile and a half away as the crow flies, Nature seems to have manifested its wildest forces. It is here, where the little promontory called Whinnyfold juts out, that the two great geological features of the Aberdeen coast meet. The red signite of the north joins the black gneiss of the south. That union must have been originally a wild one; there are evidences of an upheaval which must have shaken the earth to its centre. Here and there are great masses of either species of rock hurled upwards in every conceivable variety of form, sometimes fused or pressed together so that it is impossible to say exactly where gneiss ends or sienite begins; but broadly speaking here is an irregular line of separation. This line runs seawards to the east and its strength is shown in its outcrop. For half a mile or more the rocks rise through the sea singly or in broken masses ending in a dangerous cluster known as "The Skares" and which has had for centuries its full toll of wreck and disaster. Did the sea hold its dead where they fell, its floor around the Skares would be whitened with their bones, and new islands could build themselves with the piling wreckage. At times one may see here the ocean in her fiercest mood; for it is when the tempest drives from the south-east that the sea is fretted amongst the rugged rocks and sends its spume landwards. The rocks that at calmer times rise dark from the briny deep are lost to sight for moments in the grand onrush of the waves. The seagulls which usually whiten them, now flutter around screaming, and the sound of their shrieks comes in on the gale almost in a continuous note, for the

single cries are merged in the multitudinous roar of sea and air.

The village, squatted beside the emboucher of the Water of Cruden at the northern side of the bay is simple enough; a few rows of fishermen's cottages, two or three great redtiled drying-sheds nestled in the sand-heap behind the fishers' houses. For the rest of the place as it was when first I saw it, a little lookout beside a tall flagstaff on the northern cliff, a few scattered farms over the inland prospect, one little hotel down on the western bank of the Water of Cruden with a fringe of willows protecting its sunk garden which was always full of fruits and flowers.

From the most southern part of the beach of Cruden Bay to Whinnyfold village the distance is but a few hundred yards; first a steep pull up the face of the rock; and then an even way, beside part of which runs a tiny stream. To the left of this path, going towards Whinnyfold, the ground rises in a bold slope and then falls again all round, forming a sort of wide miniature hill of some eighteen or twenty acres. Of this the southern side is sheer, the black rock dipping into the waters of the little bay of Whinnyfold, in the centre of which is a picturesque island of rock shelving steeply from the water on the northern side, as is the tendency of all the gneiss and granite in this part. But to east and north there are irregular bays or openings, so that the furthest points of the promontory stretch out like fingers. At the tips of these are reefs of sunken rock falling down to deep water and whose existence can only be suspected in bad weather when the rush of the current beneath sends up swirling eddies or curling masses of foam. These little bays are mostly curved and are green where falling earth or drifting sand have hidden the outmost side of the rocks and given a foothold to the seagrass and clover. Here have been at some time or other great caves, now either fallen in or silted up with sand, or obliterated with the earth brought down in

the rush of surface-water in times of long rain. In one of these bays, Broad Haven, facing right out to the Skares, stands an isolated pillar of rock called locally the "Puir mon" through whose base, time and weather have worn a hole through which one may walk dryshod.

Through the masses of rocks that run down to the sea from the sides and shores of all these bays are here and there natural channels with straight edges as though cut on purpose for the taking in of the cobbles belonging to the fisher folk of Whinnyfold.

When first I saw the place I fell in love with it. Had it been possible I should have spent my summer there, in a house of my own, but the want of any place in which to live forbade such an opportunity. So I stayed in the little hotel, the Kilmarnock Arms.

The next year I came again, and the next, and the next. And then I arranged to take a feu at Whinnyfold and to build a house overlooking the Skares for myself. The details of this kept me constantly going to Whinnyfold, and my house to be was always in my thoughts.

Hitherto my life had been an uneventful one. At school I was, though secretly ambitious, dull as to results. At College I was better off, for my big body and athletic powers gave me a certain position in which I had to overcome my natural shyness. When I was about eight and twenty I found myself nominally a barrister, with no knowledge whatever of the practice of law and but little less of the theory, and with a commission in the Devil's Own—the irreverent name given to the Inns of Court Volunteers. I had few relatives, but a comfortable, though not great, fortune; and I had been round the world, dilettante fashion.

# CHAPTER II GORMALA

All that night I thought of the dead child and of the peculiar vision which had come to me. Sleeping or waking it was all the same; my mind could not leave the parents in procession as seen in imagination, or their distracted mien in reality. Mingled with them was the great-eyed, aquiline-featured, gaunt old woman who had taken such an interest in the affair, and in my part of it. I asked the landlord if he knew her, since, from his position as postmaster he knew almost everyone for miles around. He told me that she was a stranger to the place. Then he added:

"I can't imagine what brings her here. She has come over from Peterhead two or three times lately; but she doesn't seem to have anything at all to do. She has nothing to sell and she buys nothing. She's not a tripper, and she's not a beggar, and she's not a thief, and she's not a worker of any sort. She's a queer-looking lot anyhow. I fancy from her speech that she's from the west; probably from some of the far-out islands. I can tell that she has the Gaelic from the way she speaks."

Later on in the day, when I was walking on the shore near the Hawklaw, she came up to speak to me. The shore was quite lonely, for in those days it was rare to see anyone on the beach except when the salmon fishers drew their nets at the ebbing tide. I was walking towards Whinnyfold when she came upon me silently from behind. She must have been hidden among the bent-grass of the sandhills for had she been anywhere in view I must have seen her on that desolate shore. She was evidently a most imperious person; she at once addressed me in a tone and manner which made me feel as though I were in some way an inferior, and in somehow to blame:

"What for did ye no tell me what ye saw yesterday?" Instinctively I answered:

"I don't know why. Perhaps because it seemed so ridiculous." Her stern features hardened into scorn as she replied:

"Are Death and the Doom then so redeekulous that they pleasure ye intil silence?" I somehow felt that this was a little too much and was about to make a sharp answer, when suddenly it struck me as a remarkable thing that she knew already. Filled with surprise I straightway asked her:

"Why, how on earth do you know? I told no one." I stopped for I felt all at sea; there was some mystery here which I could not fathom. She seemed to read my mind like an open book, for she went on looking at me as she spoke, searchingly and with an odd smile.

"Eh! laddie, do ye no ken that ye hae een that can see? Do ye no understand that ye hae een that can speak? Is it that one with the Gift o' Second Sight has no an understandin' o' it. Why, yer face when ye saw the mark o' the Doom, was like a printed book to een like mine."

"Do you mean to tell me" I asked "that you could tell what I saw, simply by looking at my face?"

"Na! na! laddie. Not all that, though a Seer am I; but I knew that you had seen the Doom! It's no that varied that there need be any mistake. After all Death is only one, in whatever way we may speak!" After a pause of thought I asked her:

"If you have the power of Second Sight why did you not see the vision, or whatever it was, yourself?"

"Eh! laddie" she answered, shaking her head "'Tis little ye ken o' the wark o' the Fates! Learn ye then that the Voice speaks only as it listeth into chosen ears, and the Vision comes only to chosen een. None can will to hear or to see, to pleasure themselves." "Then" I said, and I felt that there was a measure of triumph in my tone "if to none but the chosen is given to know, how comes it that you, who seem not to have been chosen on this occasion at all events, know all the same?" She answered with a touch of impatience:

"Do ye ken, young sir, that even mortal een have power to see much, if there be behind them the thocht, an' the knowledge and the experience to guide them aright. How, think ye, is it that some can see much, and learn much as they gang; while others go blind as the mowdiwart, at the end o' the journey as before it?"

"Then perhaps you will tell me how much you saw, and how you saw it?"

"Ah! to them that have seen the Doom there needs but sma' guidance to their thochts. Too lang, an' too often hae I mysen seen the death-sark an' the watch-candle an' the dead-hole, not to know when they are seen tae ither een. Na, na! laddie, what I kent o' yer seein' was no by the Gift but only by the use o' my proper een. I kent not the muckle o' what ye saw. Not whether it was ane or ither o' the garnishins o' the dead; but weel I kent that it was o' death."

"Then," I said interrogatively "Second Sight is altogether a matter of chance?"

"Chance! chance!" she repeated with scorn. "Na! young sir; when the Voice has spoken there is no more chance than that the nicht will follow the day."

"You mistake me," I said, feeling somewhat superior now that I had caught her in an error, "I did not for a moment mean that the Doom—whatever it is—is not a true forerunner. What I meant was that it seems to be a matter of chance in whose ear the Voice—whatever it is—speaks; when once it has been ordained that it is to sound in the ear of some one." Again she answered with scorn:

"Na, na! there is no chance o' ocht aboot the Doom. Them that send forth the Voice and the Seein' know well to whom

it is sent and why. Can ye no comprehend that it is for no bairn-play that such goes forth. When the Voice speaks, it is mainly followed by tears an' woe an' lamentation! Nae! nor is it only one bit manifestation that stands by its lanes, remote and isolate from all ither. Truly 'tis but a pairt o' the great scheme o' things; an' be sure that whoso is chosen to see or to hear is chosen weel, an' must hae their pairt in what is to be, on to the verra end."

"Am I to take it" I asked, "that Second Sight is but a little bit of some great purpose which has to be wrought out by means of many kinds; and that whoso sees the Vision or hears the Voice is but the blind unconscious instrument of Fate?"

"Aye! laddie. Weel eneuch the Fates know their wishes an' their wark, no to need the help or the thocht of any human —blind or seein', sane or silly, conscious or unconscious."

All through her speaking I had been struck by the old woman's use of the word 'Fate,' and more especially when she used it in the plural. It was evident that, Christian though she might be—and in the West they are generally devout observants of the duties of their creed—her belief in this respect came from some of the old pagan mythologies. I should have liked to question her on this point; but I feared to shut her lips against me. Instead I asked her:

"Tell me, will you, if you don't mind, of some case you have known yourself of Second Sight?"

"'Tis no for them to brag or boast to whom has been given to see the wark o' the hand o' Fate. But sine ye are yerself a Seer an' would learn, then I may speak. I hae seen the sea ruffle wi'oot cause in the verra spot where later a boat was to gang doon, I hae heard on a lone moor the hammerin' o' the coffin-wright when one passed me who was soon to dee. I hae seen the death-sark fold round the speerit o' a drowned one, in baith ma sleepin' an' ma wakin' dreams. I hae heard the settin' doom o' the Spaiks, an' I hae seen the

Weepers on a' the crood that walked. Aye, an' in mony anither way hae I seen an' heard the Coming o' the Doom."

"But did all the seeings and hearings come true?" I asked.
"Did it ever happen that you heard queer sounds or saw strange sights and that yet nothing came of them? I gather that you do not always know to whom something is going to happen; but only that death is coming to some one!" She was not displeased at my questioning but replied at once:

"Na doot! but there are times when what is seen or heard has no manifest following. But think ye, young sir, how mony a corp, still waited for, lies in the depths o' the sea; how mony lie oot on the hillsides, or are fallen in deep places where their bones whiten unkent. Nay! more, to how many has Death come in a way that men think the wark o' nature when his hastening has come frae the hand of man, untold." This was a difficult matter to answer so I changed or rather varied the subject.

"How long must elapse before the warning comes true?"

"Ye know yersel', for but yestreen ye hae seen, how the Death can follow hard upon the Doom; but there be times, nay mostly are they so, when days or weeks pass away ere the Doom is fulfilled."

"Is this so?" I asked "when you know the person regarding whom the Doom is spoken." She answered with an air of certainty which somehow carried conviction, secretly, with it.

"Even so! I know one who walks the airth now in all the pride o' his strength. But the Doom has been spoken of him. I saw him with these verra een lie prone on rocks, wi' the water rinnin' down from his hair. An' again I heard the minute bells as he went by me on a road where is no bell for a score o' miles. Aye, an' yet again I saw him in the kirk itsel' wi' corbies flyin' round him, an' mair gatherin' from afar!"

Here was indeed a case where Second Sight might be tested; so I asked her at once, though to do so I had to overcome a strange sort of repugnance:

"Could this be proved? Would it not be a splendid case to make known; so that if the death happened it would prove beyond all doubt the existence of such a thing as Second Sight." My suggestion was not well received. She answered with slow scorn:

"Beyon' all doot! Doot! Wha is there that doots the bein' o' the Doom? Learn ye too, young sir, that the Doom an' all thereby is no for traffickin' wi' them that only cares for curiosity and publeecity. The Voice and the Vision o' the Seer is no for fine madams and idle gentles to while away their time in play-toy make-believe!" I climbed down at once.

"Pardon me!" I said "I spoke without thinking. I should not have said so—to you at any rate." She accepted my apology with a sort of regal inclination; but the moment after she showed by her words she was after all but a woman!

"I will tell ye; that so in the full time ye may hae no doot yersel'. For ye are a Seer and as Them that has the power hae gien ye the Gift it is no for the like o' me to cumber the road o' their doin'. Know ye then, and remember weel, how it was told ye by Gormala MacNiel that Lauchlane Macleod o' the Outer Isles hae been Called; tho' as yet the Voice has no sounded in his ears but only in mine. But ye will see the time——"

She stopped suddenly as though some thought had struck her, and then went on impressively:

"When I saw him lie prone on the rocks there was ane that bent ower him that I kent not in the nicht wha it was, though the licht o' the moon was around him. We shall see! We shall see!"

Without a word more she turned and left me. She would not listen to my calling after her; but with long strides passed up the beach and was lost among the sandhills.

## CHAPTER III AN ANCIENT RUNE

On the next day I rode on my bicycle to Peterhead, and walked on the pier. It was a bright clear day, and a fresh northern breeze was blowing. The fishing boats were ready to start at the turn of the tide; and as I came up the first of them began to pass out through the harbour mouth. Their movement was beautiful to see; at first slowly, and then getting faster as the sails were hoisted, till at last they swept through the narrow entrance, scuppers under, righting themselves as they swung before the wind in the open sea. Now and again a belated smacksman came hurrying along to catch his boat before she should leave the pier.

The eastern pier of Peterhead is guarded by a massive wall of granite, built in several steps or tiers, which breaks the fury of the gale. When a northern storm is on, it is a wild spot; the waves dash over it in walls of solid green topped with mountainous masses of foam and spray. But at present, with the July sun beating down, it was a vantage post from which to see the whole harbour and the sea without. I climbed up and sat on the top, looking on admiringly, and lazily smoked in quiet enjoyment. Presently I noticed some one very like Gormala come hurrying along the pier, and now and again crouching behind one of the mooring posts. I said nothing but kept an eye on her, for I supposed that she was at her usual game of watching some one.

Soon a tall man strode leisurely along, and from every movement of the woman I could see that he was the subject of her watching. He came near where I sat, and stood there with that calm unconcerned patience which is a characteristic of the fisherman.

He was a fine-looking fellow, well over six feet high, with a tangled mass of thick red-yellow hair and curly, bushy beard. He had lustrous, far-seeing golden-brown eyes, and finely-cut features. His massive. pilot-cloth spangled all over with silver herring scales, were tucked into great, bucket-boots. He wore a heavy blue jersey and a cap of weazel skin. I had been thinking of the decline of the herring from the action of the trawlers in certain waters, and fancied this would be a good opportunity to get a local opinion. Before long I strolled over and joined this son of the He gave it, and was Vikinas. it decided а uncompromisingly against the trawlers and the laws which allowed them to do their nefarious work. He spoke in a sort of old-fashioned, biblical language which was moderate and devoid of epithets, but full of apposite illustration. When he had pointed out that certain fishing grounds, formerly most prolific of result to the fishers, were now absolutely worthless he ended his argument:

"And, sure, good master, it stands to rayson. Suppose you be a farmer, and when you have prepared your land and manured it, you sow your seed and plough the ridges and make it all safe from wind and devastatin' storm. If, when the green corn be shootin' frae the airth, you take your harrow and drag it ath'art the springin' seed, where be then the promise of your golden grain?"

For a moment or two the beauty of his voice, the deep, resonant, earnestness of his tone and the magnificent, simple purity of the man took me away from the scene. He seemed as though I had looked him through and through, and had found him to be throughout of golden worth. Possibly it was the imagery of his own speech and the colour which his eyes and hair and cap suggested, but he seemed to me for an instant as a small figure projected against a background of rolling upland clothed in ripe grain. Round his feet were massed the folds of a great white sheet whose

edges faded into air. In a moment the image passed, and he stood before me in his full stature.

I almost gasped, for just behind him, where she had silently come, stood Gormala, gazing not at the fisherman but at me, with eyes that positively blazed with a sort of baleful eagerness. She was looking straight into my eyes; I knew it when I caught the look of hers.

The fisherman went on talking. I did not, however, hear what he was saying, for again some mysterious change had come over our surroundings. The blue sea had over it the mystery of the darkness of the night; the high noon sun had lost its fiery vigour and shone with the pale yellow splendour of a full moon. All around me, before and on either hand, was a waste of waters; the very air and earth seemed filmed with moving water, and the sound of falling waters was in my ears. Again, the golden fisherman was before me for an instant, not as a moving speck but in full size now he lay prone; limp and lifeless, with waxen cold cheeks, in the eloquent inaction of death. The white sheet—I could see now that it was a shroud—was around him up to his heart. I seemed to feel Gormala's eyes burning into my brain as I looked. All at once everything seemed to resume its proper proportion, and I was listening calmly to the holding forth of the Viking.

I turned instinctively and looked at Gormala. For an instant her eyes seemed to blaze triumphantly; then she pulled the little shawl which she wore closer round her shoulders and, with a gesture full of modesty and deference turned away. She climbed up the ridges of the harbour wall and sat looking across as at the sea beyond, now studded with a myriad of brown sails.

A little later the stolid indifference as to time slipped all at once from the fisherman. He was instinct with life and action, and with a touch of his cap and a "Farewell good Master!" stood poised on the very edge of the pier ready to spring on a trim, weather-beaten smack which came rushing along almost grazing the rough stone work. It made our hearts jump as he sprang on board and taking the tiller from the hand of the steersman turned the boat's head to the open sea. As she rushed out through the harbour mouth we heard behind us the voice of an old fisherman who had hobbled up to us:

"He'll do that once too often! Lauchlane Macleod is like all these men from Uist and the rest of the Out Islanders. They don't care 'naught about naught.'"

Lauchlane Macleod! The very man of whom Gormala had prophesied! The very mention of his name seemed to turn me cold.

After lunch at the hotel I played golf on the links till evening drew near. Then I got on my bicycle to return home. I had laboured slowly up the long hill to the Stirling quarry when I saw Gormala sitting on the roadside on a great boulder of red granite. She was evidently looking out for me, for when I came near she rose up and deliberately stood in the roadway in my path. I jumped off my wheel and asked her point blank what she wanted with me so much that she stopped me on the road.

Gormala was naturally an impressive figure, but at present she looked weird and almost unearthly. Her tall, gaunt form lit by the afterglow in a soft mysterious light was projected against the grey of the darkening sea, whose sombreness was emphasised by the brilliant emerald green of the sward which fell from where we stood to the jagged cliff-line.

The loneliness of the spot was profound. From where we stood not a house was to be seen, and the darkening sea was desert of sails. It seemed as if we two were the only living things in nature's vast expanse. To me it was a little awesome. Gormala's first mysterious greeting when I had seen the mourning for the child, and her persistent following

of me ever since, had begun to get on my nerves. She had become a sort of enforced condition to me, and whether she was present in the flesh or not, the expectation or the apprehension of her coming—I hardly knew which it was—kept my thoughts perpetually interested in her. Now, her weird, statuesque attitude and the scene around us finished my intellectual subjugation. The weather had changed to an almost inconceivable degree. The bright clear sky of the morning had become darkly mysterious, and the wind had died away to an ominous calm. Nature seemed altogether sentient, and willing to speak directly to a man in my own receptive mood. The Seer-woman evidently knew this, for she gave fully a minute of silence for the natural charm to work before she spoke. Then in a solemn warning voice she said:

"Time is flying by us; Lammas-tide is nigh." The words impressed me, why I know not; for though I had heard of Lammas-tide I had not the smallest idea of what was meant by it. Gormala was certainly quick with her eyes—she had that gypsy quality in remarkable degree—and she seemed to read my face like an open book. There was a suppressed impatience in her manner, as of one who must stop in the midst of some important matter to explain to a child whose aid is immediately necessary:

"Ye no ken why? Is it that ye dinna heed o' Lammas-tide, or that ye no ken o' the prophecy of the Mystery of the Sea and the treasures that lie hid therein." I felt more than ever abashed, and that I should have known long ago those things of which the gaunt woman spoke, towering above me as I leaned on my wheel. She went on:

"An' ye no ken, then listen and learn!" and she spoke the following rune in a strange, staccato cadence which seemed to suit our surroundings and to sink into my heart and memory so deep that to forget would be impossible:

"An' learn the secrets that there be, "Gather in one these weirds three:

"A gowden moon on a flowin' tide,
"And Lammas floods for the spell to bide;
"And a gowden mon wi' death for his bride."

There was a long pause of silence between us, and I felt very strangely. The sea before me took odd, indefinite shape. It seemed as though it was of crystal clearness, and that from where I gazed I could see all its mysteries. That is, I could see so as to know there were mysteries, though what they were individually I could not even dream. The past and the present and the future seemed to be mingled in one wild, chaotic, whirling dream, from the mass of which thoughts and ideas seemed now and again to fly out unexpectedly on all sides as do sparks from hot iron under the hammer. Within my heart grew vague indefinite yearnings, aspirations, possibilities. There came a sense of power so paramount that instinctively I drew myself up to my full height and became conscious of the physical vigour within me. As I did so I looked around and seemed to wake from a dream.

Naught around me but the drifting clouds, the silent darkening land and the brooding sea. Gormala was nowhere to be seen.

# CHAPTER IV LAMMAS FLOODS

When I got to Cruden it was guite dark. I had lingered by the way thinking of Gormala MacNiel and all the queer kind of mystery in which she seemed to be enmeshing me. The more I thought, the more I was puzzled; for the strangest thing of all to me was that I understood part of what seemed to be a mystery. For instance I was but imperfectly acquainted with the Seer-woman's view of what was to be the result of her watching of Lauchlane Macleod. I knew of course from her words at our first conversation that in him she recognised a man doomed to near death according to the manifestation of her own power of Second Sight; but I knew what she did not seem to, that this was indeed a golden man. From the momentary glimpse which I had had in that gueer spell of trance, or whatever it was which had come to me on the pier head, I had seemed to know him as a man of gold, sterling throughout. It was not merely that his hair was red gold and that his eyes might fairly be called golden, but his whole being could only be expressed in that way; so that when Gormala spoke, the old rhyme seemed at once a prime factor in the group of three powers which had to be united before the fathoming of the Mystery of the Sea. I accordingly made up my mind to speak with the Seerwoman and to ask her to explain. My own intellectual attitude to the matter interested me. I was not sceptical, I did not believe; but I think my mind hung in poise. Certainly my sympathies tended towards the mysterious side, backed up by some kind of understanding of the inner nature of things which was emotional or unintentional rather than fixed.

All that night I seemed to dream, my mind working eternally round the data of the day; hundreds of different

relationships between Gormala, Lauchlane Macleod, Lammas-tide, the moon and the secrets of the sea revolved before me. It was grey morning before I fell asleep to the occasional chirping of the earliest birds.

As sometimes happens after a night of uneasy dreaming of some disturbing topic, the reaction of the morning carried oblivion with it. It was well into the afternoon when all at once I remembered the existence of the witch-woman—for as such I was beginning to think of Gormala. The thought came accompanied by a sense of oppression which was not of fear, but which was certainly of uneasiness. Was it possible that the woman had in some way, or to some degree, hypnotised me. I remembered with a slightly nervous feeling how the evening before I had stopped on the roadway obedient to her will, and how I had lost the identity of my surroundings in her presence. A sudden idea struck me; I went to the window and looked out. For an instant my heart seemed to be still.

Just opposite the house stood Gormala, motionless. I went out at once and joined her, and instinctively we turned our steps toward the sand-hills. As we walked along I said to her:

"Where did you disappear to last night?"

"About that which is to be done!" Her lips and her face were set; I knew it was no use following up that branch of the subject, so I asked again:

"What did you mean by those verses which you told me?" Her answer was given in a solemn tone:

"Them that made them alone can tell; until the time shall come!"

"Who made them?"

"Nane can now tell. They are as aud as the rocky foundations o' the isles themselves."

"Then how did you come to know them?" There was a distinct note of pride in her answer. Such a note as might be

expected from a prince speaking of his ancestry:

"They hae come doon to me through centuries. Frae mither to dochter, and from mither to dochter again, wi' never a break in the lang line o' the tellin'. Know ye, young master, that I am o' a race o' Seers. I take my name from that Gormala o' Uist who through long years foresaw the passing o' mony a one. That Gormala who throughout the islands of the west was known and feared o' all men; that Gormala whose mither's mither, and mither's mither again, away back into the darkness o' time when coracles crept towards the sunset ower the sea and returned not, held the fates o' men and women in their han's and ruled the Mysteries o' the Sea." As it was evident that Gormala must have in her own mind some kind of meaning of the prophecy, or spell, or whatever it was, I asked her again:

"But you must understand something of the meaning, or you would not attach so much importance to it?"

"I ken naught but what is seen to ma een, and to that inner e'e which telleth tae the soul that which it seeth!"

"Then why did you warn me that Lammas-tide was near at hand?" The grim woman actually smiled as she replied:

"Did ye no hearken to the words spoken of the Lammas floods, which be of the Powers that rule the Spell?"

"Well, the fact is that I don't know anything of 'Lammastide!' We do not keep it in the Church of England," I added as an afterthought, explanatory of my ignorance. Gormala was clever enough to take advantage of having caught me in a weak place; so she took advantage of it to turn the conversation into the way she wished herself:

"What saw ye, when Lauchlane Macleod grew sma' in yer een, and girt again?"

"Simply, that he seemed to be all at once a tiny image of himself, seen against a waste of ripe corn." Then it struck me that I had not as yet told her or any one else of what I had seen. How then did she know it? I was annoyed and asked her. She answered scornfully:

"How kent I it, an' me a Seer o' a race o' Seers! Are ma wakin' een then so dim or so sma' that I canna read the thochts o' men in the glances o' their een. Did I no see yer een look near an' far as quick as thocht? But what saw ye after, when ye looked rapt and yer een peered side to side, as though at one lyin' prone?" I was more annoyed than ever and answered her in a sort of stupor:

"I saw him lying dead on a rock, with a swift tide running by; and over the waters the broken track of a golden moon." She made a sound which was almost a cry, and which recalled me to myself as I looked at her. She was ablaze. She towered to her full height with an imperious, exultant mien; the light in her eyes was more than human as she said:

"Dead, as I masel' saw him an' 'mid the foam o' the tide race! An' gowd, always gowd ahint him in the een of this greater Seer. Gowden corn, and gowden moon, and gowden sea! Aye! an' I see it now, backie-bird that I hae been; the gowden mon indeed, wi' his gowden een an' his gowden hair and all the truth o' his gowden life!" Then turning to me she said fiercely:

"Why did I warn ye that Lammas-tide was near? Go ask those that value the months and days thereof, when be Lammas and what it means to them that hae faith. See what they are; learn o' the comin' o' the moon and o' the flowin' o' the tides that follow!"

Without another word she turned and left me.

I went back to the hotel at once, determined to post myself as to Lammas-tide; its facts and constitutions, and the beliefs and traditions that hung around it. Also to learn the hours of the tides, and the age of the moon about the time of Lammas-tide. Doubtless I could have found out all I wanted from some of the ministers of the various houses of religion which hold in Cruden; but I was not wishful to make public, even so far, the mystery which was closing around me. My feeling was partly a saving sense of humour, or the fear of ridicule, and partly a genuine repugnance to enter upon the subject with any one who might not take it as seriously as I could wish. From which latter I gather that the whole affair was becoming woven into the structure of my life.

Possibly it was, that some trait, or tendency, or power which was individual to me was beginning to manifest itself and to find its means of expression. In my secret heart I not only believed but knew that some instinct within me was guiding my thoughts in some strange way. The sense of occult power which is so vital a part of divination was growing within me and asserting its masterdom, and with it came an equally forceful desire of secrecy. The Seer in me, latent so long, was becoming conscious of his strength, and jealous of it.

At this time, as the feeling of strength and consciousness grew, it seemed to lose something of its power from this very cause. Gradually it was forced upon me that for the full manifestation of such faculty as I might possess, some kind of abstraction or surrender of self was necessary. Even a few hours of experience had taught me much; for now that my mind was bent on the phenomena of Second Sight the whole living and moving world around me became a veritable diorama of possibilities. Within two days from the episode at the Pier head I had had behind me a larger experience of effort of occult force than generally comes to a man in a lifetime. When I look back, it seems to me that all the forces of life and nature became exposed to my view. A thousand things which hitherto I had accepted in simple faith as facts, were pregnant with new meanings. I began to understand that the whole earth and sea, and air—all that of which human beings generally ordinarily take cognisance, is but a film or crust which hides the deeper moving powers or forces. With this insight I began to understand the grand guesses of the Pantheists, pagan and christian alike, who out of their spiritual and nervous and intellectual sensitiveness began to realise that there was somewhere a purposeful cause of universal action. An action which in its special or concrete working appeared like the sentience of nature in general, and of the myriad items of its cosmogony.

I soon learned that Lammas day is the first of August and is so often accompanied by heavy weather that Lammas floods are almost annually recurrent. The eve of the day is more or less connected with various superstitions.

This made me more eager for further information, and by the aid of a chance friend, I unearthed at Aberdeen a learned professor who gave me offhand all the information which I desired. In fact he was so full of astronomical learning that I had to stop him now and again in order to elucidate some point easily explainable to those who understood his terminology, but which wrapped my swaddling knowledge in a mystery all its own. I have a sneaking friendliness even now for anyone to whom the word 'syzygy' carries no special meaning.

I got at the bases of facts, however, and understood that on the night of July 31, which was the eve of Lammas-tide, the moon would be full at midnight. I learned also that from certain astronomical reasons the tide which would ostensibly begin its flow a little after midnight would in reality commence just on the stroke. As these were the points which concerned me I came away with a new feeling of awe upon me. It seemed as though the heavens as well as the earth were bending towards the realisation or fulfillment of the old prophecy. At this time my own connection with the mystery, or how it might affect me personally, did not even enter my head. I was content to be an obedient item in the general scheme of things.