

## At Cape Clear

Morgan shoved his hands deeper into his pockets and sighed. He was walking along the Southwestern coast of Ireland. He stopped for a moment and looked out at the waters of Cape Clear, illuminated every now and then by moonlight as it broke through the light cloud cover. To be sure, it was a beautiful sight, but he had seen it every night for the past two weeks, and it was beginning to lose some of the wonder it held the first night.

A lone tear welled in Morgan's eye, slowly growing until it spilled down his cheek. This was an improvement. Two weeks ago, he had wept for hours. A week ago he was down to a single hour. Now his tears were all but dried. She was gone.

Actually, she had never been his to begin with, but Morgan tried not to think of this too much. As far as he was concerned, there could be no other choice but him. How could she possibly choose another?

His reverie was interrupted by the sudden realization that he was not alone. In fact, the other person had been there for some time. What made him realize the fact was a soft sound. It was some sort of flute, he supposed. Whoever was playing it was doing so very softly, or perhaps not very nearby.

Morgan started listening intently. The song was beautiful, but a bit melancholy. Perhaps it was because the flute was alone, with no other instruments. But even with other instruments, Morgan realized that it was the melody itself that was sad. Then the moon broke through the clouds again, and Morgan's breath caught.

The music was indeed coming from far away, but it was as though Morgan's eyes could penetrate the distance and reveal the figure clearly. It was a woman, tall and fair-skinned, with wavy red hair that reached almost all

the way down her back, and it danced on the wind, caressing the air. Her dress was long and pure white, and almost glowed in the moonlight. She was turned away from him, so her face was hidden, and the music was muted.

Clouds covered the moon again, and the woman vanished from his sight. Morgan felt almost hypnotized, and he followed the sound of the flute, stumbling over rocks in the darkness. The closer he came to the woman, the louder the music grew, filling his ears with its sad, beautiful melody.

The moon shone down again, and he found the woman barely at arm's length, and he came to a sudden stop. Her hair almost touched him as it billowed in the wind. Her song was now all that he heard, and though it made him sad to hear it, it soothed his aching heart as well. He closed his eyes and slowly swayed in time with the melody.

The song ended many long moments before Morgan realized it had stopped. He opened his eyes, but the moon was behind a cloud, and he couldn't see the woman anymore. He reached a hand toward her, hoping to touch her, to let her know he was there, but he felt nothing, not even her hair. A brief flash of moonlight revealed that he was alone.

He frantically turned, searching for her, but he couldn't see anything for several minutes. When the moon finally illuminated Cape Clear once again, he caught a glimpse of her auburn hair against her white dress, far inland from where Morgan stood. She was leaving.

He almost followed her, but decided against it. He would return to this spot tomorrow night and wait for her. Maybe then...

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Morgan sighed and took one last drag off his cigarette, then dropped it and crushed the butt. This was the third night in a row he'd waited in vain for the woman in white to show herself again.

At times during these days, he'd asked himself exactly what he was doing. In fact, that same question had been posed to him by some of his coworkers when they managed to get him to tell why he was so preoccupied. This obsession with the flute-playing woman was interfering with his sleep, and that was interfering with his work schedule. After all, they had to be on their way back to the States in another few weeks, and if he didn't get in gear, he would delay the merger.

Merger...as if he cared anymore. He had already drafted a resignation letter, effective as soon as they were back in America. It wasn't because of the woman in white, it was because of Leslie and how she'd chosen...

*Stop lying to yourself*, Morgan chided. He could lie to everyone else, but not himself. Leslie hadn't crossed his mind since he'd heard that flute.

There it was! The same sad song! He frantically turned in circles, looking for her. It was distant, but he managed to head in the right direction after a minute.

But as Morgan approached, he realized that it wasn't the flute, it was her voice. She was singing. He couldn't make out the words yet, but he was determined not to let her get away this time without at least finding out her name.

There she was, looking out at the Atlantic Ocean, hair and dress lightly blowing in the wind. Morgan slowly drew closer to her, afraid of frightening her away. He was now almost close enough to touch her, but he couldn't make himself interrupt her song.

*'...with the sea and the land  
and all creatures hand in hand  
Shall with one voice raise a song  
And earth herself shall sing along'*

Her voice stopped. Morgan gave a respectful moment of silence, then spoke, hoping he wouldn't startle the woman. "That was beautiful."

To his own surprise, she didn't jump, or even turn. It was as if she had known all along that he was there. "You are kind. Few have spoken well of my songs, or even spoken of them at all. I am seldom approached." Her voice held an accent like most people he had met in Ireland, and he found it very attractive.

"Why not? You have a beautiful voice. And you play the flute well. I confess, a few nights ago, I listened to you play."

"I knew you were there."

"Then why did you leave before I could speak to you?"

Finally, she turned to face him. Now that he could see her face, Morgan felt he had never seen a woman so beautiful in his life. Her skin was pale, but it only made her hair seem that much more alive with color. Her lips were also pink, and seemed to have a natural upward curve, as though about to smile. Her eyes, too, were alive, a bright emerald green, but they reflected a deep sadness, despite the upward-curved lips.

"Because, gentle stranger, I felt your grief, and knew I should leave you to your thoughts."

Morgan continued to stare at this pale beauty, and finally found his voice. "What's your name?"

She studied his face for a moment, as though measuring his intentions, but then her eyes softened. "Fenella."

Before he could stop himself, he reached out and took one of her hands, feeling it small and cool against his. "Fenella...that is a beautiful name, and you are a beautiful woman."

The promise of a smile on her lips became a reality, and despite the sadness that remained in her eyes, Fenella seemed truly touched. “Would that I could return your compliment, but I still do not know your name.”

He smiled as well, feeling that the ice had been broken. “I’m Morgan.”

Fenella took Morgan’s other hand. “And now that your grief has been eased, would you care to walk with me along the cape?”

“If you hadn’t asked me, I would’ve asked you.”

They turned and walked together along the shore, though Morgan felt much lighter in spirit than he had in weeks. Turning to Fenella, he asked, “Were you born here?”

“Aye, Morgan. I have never left this land. Indeed, it is my home, and I will never leave it.”

“That song you were playing the other night...it was beautiful. Did you write it?”

“You could say that. Or in a sense, you could say I was simply the channel through which it wrote itself.”

Morgan chuckled. “I’m afraid you lost me.”

Fenella looked down, as if composing her thoughts. “Music is all I have left, gentle Morgan. There is nothing else for me. But if I let the music come alive through me, then I feel as if I am still useful, somehow.”

“Surely that’s not true. I mean, what about your family?”

Fenella shook her head. “I have no family left. They are all gone.”

Morgan stopped, and gently turned Fenella to face him. “You really have nobody? Not even one person? What about friends?” He felt he now understood the sadness in her eyes.

“No, not even friends. I come out here to play and to sing, and then I leave.”

Morgan looked deep into her eyes, almost feeling he could fall into them. "Well, as long as you keep coming here, Fenella, you will have a friend in me. I will listen to you sing, or play. And I will walk with you, and be your friend, unless you tell me to go away."

She looked down, as if deep in thought. Morgan softly laid his hands on her shoulders, which were bare due to the cut of her white dress. Her skin was smooth and cool. Finally, she looked back up at him, and though he wondered if he were imagining the change, her eyes seemed a bit less sad. "I would not turn you away, gentle Morgan."

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Fenella held the last note out on what Morgan now knew was a tinwhistle, and it faded into the night. She lowered the whistle from her lips as he smiled up at her from the rock he was sitting on.

"Beautiful, as always." That earned him a smile, and it seemed with every smile, the sadness in Fenella's eyes grew less and less.

It had been almost a week since he had first spoken with Fenella, and every night since their walk, they had met at Cape Clear. Fenella would play her tinwhistle, or she would sing, and Morgan would sit and listen, enraptured. Sometimes they would talk, but mostly they would sit side by side and look at the ocean...though Morgan found his eyes straying to Fenella very quickly, and if she noticed, she didn't seem to mind his attention.

Once again, she sat beside him, and he soon found his eyes drinking in her beautiful face, then drifting down her pale, graceful neck, her pale, soft shoulders, the way the moonlight accentuated her collarbone just above the top of her dress...his eyes drifted down to her delicate feet, that he had not at first realized were bare.

When his gaze returned to her face, he found her looking back at him.  
“You stare at me night after night. Why?”

Morgan blushed a little, embarrassed at being caught. “I’m...I’m sorry, I just think you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met.”

Her head coked a bit to one side. “Even more beautiful than her?”

Morgan hesitated. “Her?”

“The first night you heard my music, you were deep in grief. It could only have been over the loss of someone special.”

Morgan looked away at the ocean for a minute. He realized Fenella would probably let him get away with not answering, but suddenly, that didn’t feel right. He had almost forgotten Leslie...almost. “Her name is Leslie. She... she’s someone I met back in America. I admired her from afar, because I was too scared to talk to her. Finally I worked up the nerve to ask her out, but...but I was too late...by fifteen minutes.” Tears welled in his eyes again. “Can you believe that? Fifteen minutes earlier and I would’ve beaten the other guy. She said if I had come to her sooner, she might’ve said yes, but she wouldn’t hurt his feelings.”

Morgan sniffed and wiped his cheeks. “I asked her if she would think of me if she was ever free again, and she promised that she would. But the day before I left to come here, Leslie called me...said this other guy asked her to marry him. I didn’t know what to say. Of course, it’s all perfectly stupid, me feeling like this. It’s my own fault for taking so long, and I never really had a chance, but I can’t help feeling like I lost her.”

Morgan finally faced Fenella again, and was shocked to see her openly crying. She slowly reached her hand to touch his face, her hand shaking almost as if she wasn’t sure how he would react. “I’m so sorry, gentle Morgan.”

Morgan managed a smile and covered her hand with his own. “No, Fenella, don’t be. Ever since I heard you play, I’ve felt free again. As if this burden was lifted.”

Their eyes locked for many long moments, and then both moved at the same time, their lips meeting in a soft, short kiss. They barely parted, just enough to search each other’s faces for signs of approval, then they kissed again, and again, each kiss longer and more passionate than the one before, moving closer on the rocks, until anyone watching from afar might see only one silhouette.

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Morgan waited patiently at their special meeting spot. It was the night before he had to leave for America. He had already turned in his resignation. This was a very important night. He needed to convince Fenella to come with him.

Morgan almost couldn’t believe how deeply he had fallen in love with Fenella. But he couldn’t deny what he felt in his heart. And she loved him back, he knew. She had told him.

He already had the whole thing planned. He would take her back to the States and take her on a tour of the coast...maybe both coasts. They would move wherever she felt most comfortable. Then they would marry, and live together forever.

He heard her humming, and a smile crept across his face. He turned and saw her coming to him, her skin and dress seeming to glow in the moonlight. She threw herself into his arms and they shared a long kiss. Finally parting, she smiled up at him. “Hello, my love.”

“Hello, Fenella. What is it tonight? Your voice or the tinwhistle?”



And so she sang for him, a love song that seemed to be as old as the rock he sat upon, and yet as fresh and clean as the ocean that he saw behind her. Then she sat with him and they embraced.

Morgan knew this was the time. “Fenella, you know that I came here on a business trip from America...”

“Mmm, aye, gentle Morgan.”

“Well, tomorrow is the day I am to return to my country.” He felt her stiffen against him, and he looked into her grief-stricken eyes, sudden tears coming to the surface. He drew her against him. “No, shh, shh, I don’t intend to leave you. I never want to leave you, my love. I want you to come with me. Marry me, Fenella. Come with me and be my bride.”

There was silence for a moment. Morgan looked down, and saw her tear-streaked face still looking at him, as her arms tightened around him. “My sweet, gentle Morgan...I told you the first night we met, that this is my home land, and I will never leave it.”

“I know, but that was before...”

“Why can’t you stay here?”

Morgan shrugged. “I hadn’t considered it. I suppose I could, it’s not as if there’s anything really tying me to America...”

Fenella shook her head and laid it down on his lap. “Perhaps I should have been more specific. Morgan, my love, I *cannot* leave this land.”

He was stunned. “What do you mean?”

She slowly unwrapped her arms from Morgan, and stood before him. He was alarmed to see that her eyes looked almost as sad as when he had first looked into them. “I fear losing you, but perhaps you must know why I must stay.”

“What...what are you talking about?” Morgan stood as well, reaching for her hands, but he took hold of nothing. He looked down and saw his hands pass through hers. In fact, he was shocked to suddenly find that he could see through her whole body. He felt the shock hit his chest like a physical blow. “No...no!” he choked out.

Translucent tears coursed down her lovely face. “I’m sorry, gentle Morgan, it is the truth.”

Morgan collapsed onto the ground, weeping. “But why? How?”

“It has been ages since I breathed air, since blood flowed through my body. Many long years I have walked this shore, singing and playing, but nobody listened. None until you. I sensed in you the acceptance that I had never received. Perhaps if I had met someone like you then...I might not have given myself to the water. Now I am condemned to forever roam this land.”

“But what about our love?”

“That is real, gentle Morgan. I do so love you, and if you had desired to stay here with me, you may never have known about this.” Morgan continued to cry. “It’s not too late, my love. You can still stay with me.”

He looked up at her. “But you...you’re not real!”

“I am as real as you need me to be.” Her body became solid again, and she reached out to touch his face. At first he shrank back from her hand, but she persisted, and he felt her skin, cool and smooth, as always. “You see?”

“I...I can’t...I’m sorry, I...” Morgan broke into fresh tears and ran inland. He heard Fenella calling his name, but he couldn’t stop himself.

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Doug leaned on the ocean liner’s railing next to Morgan, as the big ship began slowly maneuvering out of the harbor. “You gonna be OK, man?”

Morgan's face was gaunt, and his eyes were red, as if he'd been crying all night. And of course, everyone around his room had heard him doing exactly that. He never looked at Doug, just shook his head. "No...no...I just...I can't, can I?"

Doug shrugged. "Dunno, man. What is it you don't think you can do?"

For a few minutes, they watched as Ireland slowly receded. Maybe once they were out on the ocean, Morgan would lighten up. Suddenly, Morgan's eyes, which had been vacant, focused intently on something. Doug noticed the change and followed his gaze. It was too far to tell for sure, but it looked like a red-haired lady wearing a white dress standing up on a rock.

Doug was concentrating so hard on the lady that he didn't notice what Morgan was doing until it was too late.

He had climbed over the railing. Before Doug could even cry out, Morgan jumped off. Doug reached out in vain. "Morgan! What are you doing? Hey! Somebody help! Man overboard!"

They threw out life preservers and some brave people even volunteered to jump into the water to look for him. However, it was soon agreed that there was no sign of Morgan, and if he had survived the fall, the cold water probably had finished him.

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That night, and indeed many nights from that day forward, someone near Cape Clear might note the sound of a single tinwhistle, or a soft, beautiful female voice coming from the shore. And if the moon shone just right, that observer might see two figures. One of them a tall, pale-skinned woman with red hair and a flowing white dress. The other a dark-haired man sitting on a rock listening to her play or sing.