

The Unspeakable Thing

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CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS.

The little village of Garth lies on the shores of Cardigan Bay. It has but a single street of small white houses extending for nearly a mile along the coast. The backs of those nearest the sea are built up and fortified with row after row of piles and balks of timber fastened together with iron chains and clamps. For the sea is fierce when the tides are high and a west wind is blowing in Cardigan Bay. The very houses themselves are low built to meet the storms, and the slates are strengthened with layers of cement. But year after year the sea takes its toll of the inhabitants. It sweeps their homes with water and strikes them with flying shingle. It fills the backyards knee-deep with foaming waves and carries away the outhouses. At one end of the village it even undermines the masonry itself, and beats some hapless cottage into a heap of bricks and mortar. And year after year the patient folk rebuild, and re-fortify, and replace, content to live on their ridge by the courtesy of an angry ocean, though within half a mile the cliffs begin to rise from the beach, and their houses might be built on solid rock for all time.

The inhabitants of this little place are chiefly sailors and fisherfolk. Captains are exceeding plentiful. Some have retired on their savings and make a rich harvest by letting out their tiny rooms at exorbitant rates to visitors in the summer. Others are on active service. For months, for a year, for two years perhaps they disappear and return with considerable savings and much to tell to those that wait for them. Rough fellows some of them are, mostly small and tough, but men to whom the nation owes much. They live a hard life and enjoy their rest when it comes to them. A stranger walking down the street would say he had never seen so many loafers in a village before—strong able-bodied fellows lounging in the doorways with pipes in their mouths and absolutely idle from morning to night. Yet more than one of them has compressed as much physical labour and mental anxiety into 48 hours as most people experience in six months.

To the north of the village the country lies flat and low, a mere line of sand hills and shingle ending in the estuary of the Llyn. To the south it rises into hills, and the coast line changes to cliffs 500 or 600 feet in height, with enormous rocks piled up at their bases, through which the sea rushes with thunderous clamour, and the burst of foam and spray.

Directly behind the village and almost on a level with the high tides stretches the great bog of Gogerddan. It is intersected in every direction with dykes, and a small river flows through it from the hills to join the Llyn. Some of these dykes are filled with dark brown water and are absolutely stagnant. Others feel the ebb and the flow of the tides, and their depth depends on the movements of the sea up the estuary some four miles off. The bog is covered with heather and rushes, and is almost valueless as pasture. The peat, however, supplies twenty villages with fuel, and the stacks of it break the monotony of the surface with tall brown heaps, built up square and sturdy like the towers of some old fortalice.

All round this bog and on the far side of the estuary rise the mountains, towering out of woods into barren escarpments of rock. Most of them are over two thousand feet in height, and they form so gigantic and imposing a wall that one is surprised to see further heights rising above them in the far distance. These are part of the great barrier of Wales, and to this day they have kept the Welsh customs and Welsh language as living things in spite of the great tide of Saxons that beat

against them from the East.

At the foot of these hills lies the village of Trethol, noted through all the country side for its flannels, which are woven on hand looms in the houses of the cottagers. And looking across the bog from Garth one large house stands out white and clear among the trees, and when the sun is setting its long line of windows turn into a bar of flame. Behind it and on either side the woods run up the mountain. In front its gardens slope down to a long grey wall, beneath which the woods again encircle it, and the tops of some of the trees are almost on a level with the coping of the wall, and so steep is the descent that it is almost possible to lean over and touch their bough.

Here, one evening in May, nearly twelve months after the events recorded in the last chapter, a young girl stood alone and gazed across the Gogerddan to the sea. In the light of the setting sun something sparkled on her cheek like a drop of liquid gold. Her face was very beautiful, and her beauty was only emphasised by the sorrow in her eyes as she gazed out across the sea.

In her hand she held a small scrap of paper, ragged and creased with much handling. Every now and then she would read it and press it to her lips. It only contained four verses of indifferent poetry; but even Shakspeare might have been proud of such a tribute from so fair a maid. The lines ran as follows:—

Have you remembrance of that night,
The long low line of tawny sand,
The sullen stretch of marshy land,
Beneath the mountain's purple height:

The cottage lights upon the lea,
The ebon cliffs against the sky,
The weary curlew's farewell cry,
From shadowed field to silent sea;

The path ascending round the hill,
The hurried expanse of grey below,
The fernpools flapping with the slow
Of one gold bar that lingered still;

Then dark against the topaz light,
Two lonely figures, man and maid,
And one too trembling and afraid,
Have you remembrance of that night?

They were signed "E.T."
"Have I remembrance?" she murmured to herself. "Have I remembrance?" And then the sun sank below the horizon, and the one gold bar lingered still, and she heard the cry of the curlew, and saw the flaming light on the fernpools. It was just such a scene as the verses described. "That night" came back to her, and she burst into tears.

She was roused from her mournful reverie by a harsh voice calling from the lawn:

"Mavanwy! Mavanwy!"

"Yes, father."
"Do you know the time? Dinner is in half an hour and you haven't started to dress yet. You know the Walroys are coming to-night?"

"Yes, father; I am coming."
She hastily dried her eyes and turned her back on the West. But before she entered the house she looked back once more and saw the sails of a brigantine silhouetted black against the golden sky. She bit her lip and passed in. The very sight of a ship was agony to her.

She put on a plain black dinner frock and came down to the drawing-room. There she found her father standing by the fireplace. There was a look of impatience on his face, and he held a watch in his hand.

"It is past the dinner hour," he said abruptly. "When I was young guests had more courtesy, and the hostess was always ready to receive them half an hour before they were due."

Mavanwy smiled sadly.
"They are Americans, father," she said, gently. "Their ideas are probably different."

Mr Morgan looked at her with disapproval.

"Is that your best dress?" he said, harshly. "You look as if you were going to a funeral."

"Black suits me, father," she answered, and she looked at herself in the glass with a little smile of vanity.

And indeed she looked superb, with her dark hair and dark eyes, and her white arms and shoulders flashing from the sombre material of her dress. Yet it was not for that reason she wore black, and her father knew it, and it was the knowledge that made him speak so bitterly. As a rule, he cared nothing for a woman's dress, and regarded any smartness as a sign of empty vanity.

"You are not old enough to wear black," he answered.

Then he consulted his watch again, and frowned.

A hard, cold man was John Morgan of Llynglas. Bred up in a strict Non-conformist family, he added all his natural harshness of character to the somewhat stern and narrow principles of his particular sect. He was poor, but poverty had had no chastening effect upon his mind. It had only served to warp his soul and arouse the worst traits of his nature. In his father's lifetime he had seen a fine property dwindle down to a few hundred acres of barren land, and a house which was only a mockery when there was no money to keep it up. He had not even the satisfaction of knowing that this was due to extravagance, and that he could lay the blame on a dead man. It had been due solely to a grasping spirit which he had himself inherited, a desire to make more money without the ability to make it, a longing for 10 per cent. instead of 4 per cent., an inclination to enter into the wildest schemes if they held out promise of immense fortunes. It is often the peculiarity of the hard and grasping man that, though he will save pennies at every turn, and strive his utmost to do other men out of odd shillings, yet he is utterly reckless when his vision is dazzled by the prospects of gold, and he is the easiest prey of the clever and unscrupulous adventurer.

Such a man had been Morgan Morgan, and his son now reaped the fruits of his avarice. The great house was almost as empty as a barn. The finest pictures had gone from the walls, and had not even been replaced by inferior copies. The library was a mere row of empty bookshelves. The dining-room would have disgraced a third-rate restaurant. The grounds about the house were ill-kept and overgrown with weeds. But the sight of all these things failed to impress John Morgan with the vanity of earthly possessions. It only filled him with a strong and immovable purpose, to make good the waste, to restore the fortunes of his family at any cost.

It was therefore the irony of fate that two years ago young Emrys Tredegar should have fallen in love with his daughter and won her heart. The young man, though of a family even superior to his own, was, if possible, in a still more hopeless financial condition. But Emrys Tredegar was dead—or, to use a phrase made familiar by the South African war, "missing"—and it seemed now that matters might work out to a satisfactory conclusion. Before young Tredegar had sailed for Peru he had let his house to two rich American brothers—the Walroys, of Chicago. They were reputed to be millionaires, and though nothing was known of their previous history, that was no thing to their discredit. They hailed from a country where men became rich in a single night, and no one comments on the fact. The elder brother, Cyrus P. Walroy, was undoubtedly in love with Mavanwy. He had even expressed his desire to marry an Englishwoman of good family, and resuscitate the fortune of some fallen house for his own

children. The only obstacle to the consummation of this ideal match was Mavanwy herself. And that is why on this night her father snapped like an angry dog at her, and the mere sight of her black dress irritated him beyond endurance.

He looked once more at his watch, and tapped his feet impatiently. Mavanwy had seated herself in a chair, and was idly turning over the pages of a magazine. His mood was such that he could not leave her alone.

"I hope you will be civil to these Walroys to-night, Mavanwy," he said, abruptly. "They are people I wish to keep friends with."

"Why should I not be civil?" she answered, scarcely raising her eyes from her book.

"The last time they were here you were barely so. But I must ask you to remember that my guests must be treated with cordiality."

Mavanwy flushed, and looked her father straight in the face.

"Which one do you wish me to be most civil—to be most cordial to?"

Mr Morgan bit his lips with vexation and turned his back on his daughter. Then he suddenly swung round and faced her.

"Cyrus Walroy loves you, Mavanwy," he said, sternly.

"I am honoured," she said, coldly. "And I am sorry for him. I am, as you know, not likely to return his affection."

At that moment there was a loud ring at the bell, and a heavy knock at the hall door. A few minutes later the door was flung open by a wizened old butler attired in very ill-fitting clothes, and two men entered. Mavanwy rose to meet them and extended her hand with a smile. The elder took it, in silence, and the marks of his muscular fingers could be seen on the flesh when he loosened it from his grasp. The younger took it with more courtesy and less warmth. Both apologised curtly for their unpunctuality, which was due to the breaking of a shaft on Taliesin Hill. They had walked the last three-quarters of a mile.

The two brothers were fine men, lean, square built, and tall. John T. Walroy, the younger, had the high cheek bones and keen angular face which in some mysterious way the true born American has inherited from the soil, as the North American Indian did before him. The features of the elder were of a coarser type. The face was more square and the jaw more heavy. It was

