

The Song of the Morrow

By Robert Louis Stevenson

The King of Duntrine had a daughter when he was old, and she was the fairest king's daughter between two seas. Her hair was like spun gold, and her eyes like pools in a river. The King gave her a castle upon the sea beach, with a terrace and a court of hewn stone and four towers at the four corners. Here she dwelt and grew up, and had no care for the morrow, and no power upon the hour, after the manner of simple men.

It befell that she walked one day by the beach of the sea when it was autumn, and the wind blew from the place of rains. Upon the one hand of her the sea beat, and upon the other the dead leaves ran. This was the loneliest beach between two seas, and strange things had been done there in ancient ages.

Now the King's daughter was aware of a crone that sat upon the beach. The sea foam ran to her feet, and the dead leaves swarmed about her back, and the rags blew about her face in the blowing of the wind.

"Now," said the King's daughter as she named a holy name, "this is the most unhappy old crone between two seas."

"Daughter of a King," said the crone, "you dwell in a stone house, and your hair is like spun gold, but what is your profit? Life is not long, nor lives strong. You live after the way of simple men and have no thought for the morrow, and no power upon the hour."

"Though for the morrow, that I have," said the King's daughter. "But power upon the hour, that I have not." And she mused within herself.

Then the crone smote her lean hands one within the other and laughed like a seagull. "Home!" cried she, "O daughter of a King, home to your stone house! Now the longing is come upon you, nor can you live any more after the manner of simple men. Home, and toil and suffer till the gift come that will make you bare, and till the man come that will bring you care."

The King's daughter made no more ado, but turned about and went home to her house in silence. And when she was come into her chamber, she called for her nurse.

"Nurse," said the King's daughter, "thought is come upon me for the morrow, so that I can live no more after the manner of simple men. Tell me what I must do that I may have power upon the hour."

Then the nurse moaned like a snow wind. "Alas," said she, "that this thing should be! The thought is gone into your marrow, nor is there any cure against the thought. Be it so, then, even as you will. Though power is less than weakness, power shall you have; and though the thought is colder than winter, yet shall you think it to an end."

So the King's daughter sat in her vaulted chamber in the masoned house, and she thought upon her thought. Nine years she sat as the sea beat upon the terrace and the gulls cried about the turrets and the wind crooned in the chimneys of the house. Nine years she came not abroad, nor tasted the clean air, nor saw God's sky. Nine years she sat and looked neither to the right nor to the left, nor heard speech of any one, but thought upon the thought of the morrow. And her nurse fed her in silence. The King's daughter took of the food with her left hand, and ate it without grace.

Now when the nine years were out, it fell dusk in the autumn; and there came a sound in the wind like a sound of piping. At that, the nurse lifted up her finger in the vaulted house.

“I hear a sound in the wind,” said she, “that is like the sound of piping.”

“It is but a little sound,” said the King’s daughter, “but yet it is sound enough for me.”

So they went down in the dusk to the doors of the house, and along the beach of the sea. Upon the one hand of them the sea beat, and upon the other the dead leaves ran. Above them the clouds raced in the sky, and the gulls flew widdershins. And when they came to that part of the beach where strange things had been done in ancient ages, lo! there was the crone, and she was dancing widdershins.

“Old crone,” said the King’s daughter, “what makes you dance widdershins here upon the bleak beach, between the waves and the dead leaves?”

“I hear a sound in the wind that is like a sound of piping,” quoth she, “and it is for that that I dance widdershins. For the gift comes that will make you bare, and the man comes that must bring you care. But for me, the morrow is come that I have thought upon, and the hour of my power.”

“How comes it, old crone,” marveled the King’s daughter, “that you waver like a rag, and pale like a dead leaf, before my eyes?”

“Because the morrow has come that I have thought upon, and the hour of my power,” said the crone. With that she fell on the beach, and lo! she was but stalks of the sea tangle and the dust of the sea sand, and the sand lice hopped upon the place of her.

“This is the strangest thing that ever befell between two seas, said the King’s daughter of Duntrine. But the nurse broke out and moaned like an autumn gale. “I am weary of the wind,” quoth she, and bewailed her day.

Then the King’s daughter was aware of a man upon the beach who went hooded that none might perceive his face, and a bagpipe was underneath his arm. The sound of his pipe was like singing wasps, and like the wind that sings in windelstraw. It took hold upon men’s ears like the crying of gulls.

“Are you the comer?” quoth the King’s daughter of Duntrine.

“I am the comer,” said he, “and these are the pipes that a man may hear; for I have power upon the hour, and this is the song of the morrow.” Then he piped the song of the morrow. It was as long as years, and nurse wept out aloud at the hearing of it.

“It is true,” said the King’s daughter, “that you pipe the song of the morrow; but that ye have power upon the hour—how may I know that? Show me a marvel here upon the beach, between the waves and the dead leaves.”

And the man said, “Upon whom?”

“Here is my nurse,” quoth the King’s daughter. “She is weary of the wind. Show me a good marvel upon her.”

And lo! the nurse fell upon the beach as it were two handfuls of dead leaves, and the wind whirled them widdershins, and the sand lice hopped upon the place of her.

“It is true,” said the King’s daughter of Duntrine. “You are the comer, and you have power upon the hour. Come with me to my stone house.”

So they went by the sea margin as the man piped the song of the morrow, and the leaves followed behind them as they went. Then they sat down together as the sea beat upon the terrace and the gulls cried about the turrets and the wind crooned in the chimneys of the house. Nine years they sat; and every year when it fell autumn, the man said, “This is the hour, and I have power in it.” But the daughter of the King said, ‘Nay, but pipe me the song of the morrow.’ And he piped it, and it was as long as years.

Now when the nine years were gone, the King’s daughter of Duntrine got to her feet like one

that remembers, and she looked about her in the masoned house. All her servants were gone; only the man that piped sat upon the terrace with the hood upon his face, and as he piped, the leaves ran about the terrace and the sea beat along the wall.

Then she cried to him with a great voice, "This is the hour; let me see the power in it." And with that, the wind blew off the hood from the man's face, and lo! there was no man there—only the clothes and the hood. The pipes tumbled one upon another in a corner of the terrace, and the dead leaves ran over them.

Then the King's daughter of Duntrine got her to that part of the beach where strange things had been done in ancient ages, and there she sat her down. The sea foam ran to her feet, and the dead leaves swarmed about her back, and the veil blew about her face in the blowing of the wind. And when she lifted up her eyes, there was the daughter of a king come walking on the beach. Her hair was like spun gold, and her eyes like pools in a river. She had no thought for the morrow and no power upon the hour, after the manner of simple men.