

Frank

ZAC TAYLOR

He stood at the railing, peering over the frosted caps of the parting seas, the morning bursting over the cold waters. The scent of sea spray flourished in his nostrils before dying away on the wind.

He hadn't slept the night before. The image of the shimmering moon danced in his mind long into the night, swaying back and forth like waves that carried his ship, glinting and spinning end on end; a beacon of his arrival. He often imagined the moon as a woman from some exotic land even he had not ventured to, a wild and mysterious mistress swaying to the rhythm of the earth. Such women he had met before, green of eye and soft of tongue, often singing long into the nights with whispering tones and gliding melodies, their silken dresses blowing and wavering under the stars of some distant land. Oh, he scoffed, how naïve he was to believe the Dublin he'd heard of could ever be anything but a trace of the world beyond its walls.

Dublin! He squinted into the dark mass silhouetted by the glimmering waters and smelt the damp air before letting his eyes adjust to the laminated, tea stained portrait of his mother he pulled from breast pocket, her frozen stare dulled in the rotting mulch of weathered paper. She was slender and beautiful, gaunt and haunting.

It was a Saturday night when he first saw Eveline, although she did not see him. She was a small girl, pale faced and with a thin frame, ferreting her way swiftly in and out of the bustling mass of shoppers. She passed quite close to him, and he noticed her green eyes glint in the pale moonlight, flickering like emeralds next to a silver flame. The smell of

sea salt and mulched paper filled his nostrils as the moon swayed behind a cloud, and a dark scowl covered her forehead to match the grey of her too many and too heavy grocery bags. He wished to offer her hand with them but stuttered on his words, sighing as she scurried away through the crowd.

The next time he saw Eveline, they met. He had seen her once again shopping; ducking in and out of the Saturday afternoon crowd. He now stood at the gate to watch her. The sun was descending over the silhouettes of the buildings in the main street, the figure of the moon piercing purple sky, but he met no sign of Her in Eveline's dull green eyes.

'Hello. Can I... Would you like help with those?'

He over-gestured to the grocery bags.

Eveline smiled and looked at the ground in a half-finished nod. He caught the faintest glimmer of silver in her gaze before she looked down, murmuring thanks. He hardly noticed the cool sea-spray that fluttered on the wind and into his face.

The moon had waned and the streets were dark save for a few coal-red fingers fleeing from the hearths of Dublin. He sang incessantly of the sailor that loves a green-eyed lass, and of other tunes with a soft tongue and a gentle tone, and from their Saturday afternoon walks to her house it became known that they were courting. Tendrils of astral light began to wash over the streets, ever growing; a silvery flood. The crescent in her eyes faded, and the flame they fluttered against grew, and drawing on the melodies of so many foreign lands, they enchanted and seduced him. She became to him a mysterious mistress swaying to the rhythm of his beating heart. The moon had waxed once more, and the streets at night were scorched by an alien evanescence. They were to be married, and scarcely did he carry the weathered picture in his breast pocket anymore.

One Friday evening Eveline's father approached him with torrid daggers in his eyes. Sawdust anchored the air and settled in his nostrils and the fireplace sputtered and spat its own eulogy. It was late; the Inn was cold, and a sour smoulder singed his nostrils and sighed through his chest, where he buttoned and unbuttoned his breast pocket to the ticking of the clock in the corner. Her father warned him to stay away from Eveline, accusing Frank of squandering his hard-earned family money on a whim.

The darkest hours of the night had long passed, and twilight invaded his small, undecorated room. The smell of varnish interrogated his nostrils and the taste of vinegar accused his tongue. The air was stagnant with charcoal, and he itched and wheezed, grasping hopelessly with his lungs. Twitching and stirring, unable to unshackle himself from his fear and his longing, he was finally dragged down into the pitch black, icy waters of his own tortured subconscious.

The smoke of the Inn followed him into those depths, and he found himself in the street across from the graveyard. The moon was eclipsed by a thick sheet of clouds. Lurching towards him, the silhouette of Eveline's father rasped and spat, murmuring with wetted lips. The clouds parted and a beam of cold white moonlight descended onto its grey face, revealing a thin line of pale dried spittle crusted onto a smiling snarl.

'Eveline is mine.' It said. 'You can't have her. Evvy doesn't belong to you, thief. Eveline is mine.'

The words rang in his ears him as he was hauled into consciousness.

Soon after that night, in one of their secret meetings, he pleaded desperately with Eveline to come with him to his home in Buenos Ayres. Creasing and straightening his mother's portrait in his hands, an impatient fire pulled him in all directions only to be

pinned to the ceiling by an icy needle. After a long pause, she assented. He kept the yellowing image close to his breast as the moon waned and then waxed again and he made his arrangements.

They stood amongst the shuffling crowd at the North Wall. He clutched at her hand, carrying in his other hand their luggage, and folded in his palm was the weathered picture. He spoke soothingly to her, although in her animal stare he saw no reflection of the swaying moon as it illuminated the silver hull of the ship that was to carry them away. Their departure drew nearer, and her despondence pressed a heavy weight upon his chest, stifling his breath, and he struggled for air.

‘Come!’

The ocean flooded his head and his throat was scorched by its salt and brine.

‘Come!’

But neither the raging oceans spilling from his ears nor the flames of his soul could thaw the frost that sealed her hand to the railing.

‘Eveline! Evvy!’

He shrunk beyond the barrier and looked to her with a helpless anguish, seeking for a reply. His eyes were met by hers, which glimmered with the reflection of the moon for an instant. It was swallowed by the clouds, and the last thing he saw of Eveline was the light fade out of her emerald eyes, leaving them a dull grey in the twilight.