

# THE DANCERS

By E. R. R. LINKLATER

**M**R. G. P. POMFRET was a wealthy man and the centre of as large a circle of friends and relations as the junior partner in a prosperous brewery might reasonably expect to be. But, until he disappeared, he was not famous. Then he became a household word, and the five members of his family—consanguineous, allied and presumptively allied—who disappeared with him, all earned pages in those indefatigable supplements to our national biography, the Sunday newspapers. For with Mr. Pomfret there also vanished Mrs. Pomfret his wife; Lt.-Commander Hugo Disney and Mrs. Disney (*née* Pomfret); Miss Joan Pomfret; and Mr. George Otto Samways, her fiancé.

The circumstances of their joint occultation were remarkable, and as the geographical environment was sufficiently and yet not immeasurably remote from the more advertised holiday haunts of man, the affair took to itself a halo of romance that was entirely different from the hectic nimbus which ever and again makes some obscure police-court luminous.

It has been said that Mr. Pomfret was wealthy. He had inherited a large number of shares in an excellent brewery and with them a sanguine and speculative temperament. His fortune persuaded the members of his family, initial and contributory, readily to accept a certain imperiousness of temper which Mr. Pomfret occasionally exhibited; and so when one evening early in June he said, from the top of his dinner-table, "I intend, subject to your approval, to take you all with me on a somewhat unusual holiday," his household (including Lt.-Commander Hugo Disney) and the solitary guest (Mr. George Otto Samways) accepted the invitation in the manner of a royal command.

"Where are we going, daddy?" asked Joan, adeptly disengaging the intendment of her peach.

"To Orkney, my dear," replied Mr. Pomfret, and surveyed with benign amusement the expressions of surprise which impinged upon or flitted across the faces of his domestic audience.

Lt.-Commander Disney alone showed no amazement. "That's excellent," he said heartily. "I've meant for long enough to go back there."

Orkney is worthy of some attention. The islands have a romantic appeal as the home of lost races. The Vikings settled there, and before the Vikings there was a mysterious people, Picts or such, little men who vanished and left few traces of their occupation. At some time Culdee monks from Ireland went there; and went again as silently. Stewart earls ruled the islands like young pagan emperors. When the Great War began the British Fleet chose Scapa Flow, in the heart of the Orkneys, as its headquarters and battle haven. Later the German Fleet also rested

there ; but at the still bottom, not on the wind-flawed surface of the waters.

It was, however, the excellence of the trout-fishing which led Lt.-Commander Disney to applaud Mr. Pomfret's decision. He had spent the less active intervals in three years of naval warfare in Scapa Flow, and had become acquainted with the opportunities of sport which the island lochs offered to a fisherman robust enough to disregard occasional inclemencies of weather. Frequently he had spoken to Mr. Pomfret of brown trout and sea trout, praising their strain of fishy pugnacity and the delicate savour of their flesh ; praising too the lure of sunny waters under a canopy of brilliant sky all painted with cloud galleons, porpoises and swimming dolphins of cloud, and at evening gorgeous with the barred crimson and gold, the errant greens, the daffodil hues, the rosy outflung feathers, of the sun sliding bedwards behind the enormous wall of the Atlantic. And these conversations, moving like yeast in Mr. Pomfret's brain, had finally given rise to this momentous decision.

It is unnecessary to consider the manner of the journey north, which was complicated. Mr. Pomfret had rented for two months a large house called Swandale, in one of the seaward parishes in the northern part of the Mainland of Orkney ; it was considered advisable to take, as well as his family, a motor-car, a chauffeur and three maids. The first week or so of their residence passed pleasantly enough. They were enraptured with the scenery, the vast stretches of ever-changing sea, the majestic cliffs loud with the ceaseless activity of gulls ; they watched the diving gannets, the ludicrous earnest puffins, the graceful terns, and hysterical oyster-catchers. They were delighted with the shy and independent islanders. They enjoyed the novelty of peat-fires blazing in an open hearth. Lt.-Commander Disney and Mrs. Disney fished with notable success in the neighbouring lochs. Mr. Pomfret walked and enquired diligently into local traditions and history. And Mrs. Pomfret read the works of Lord Lytton, to which she was ineradicably addicted. Joan Pomfret and Otto Samways occupied themselves in ways apparently satisfactory, and certainly remote from the rest of the family.

The holiday would probably have continued on these pleasant and harmless lines had it not been for the imaginative temperament (excited by love and romantic surroundings) of Miss Joan Pomfret. It suddenly occurred to her that they were rapidly approaching Midsummer Day.

Now the summer solstice has, or had, its appropriate festivals. In the northern parts of Britain the sun used indisputably to reign supreme, and, at such times as his presence blessed the earth almost throughout the circle of day and night, it was proper to honour him with dancing and other devout festivities. In Orkney he, the aureate king of the sky, succeeds at Midsummer in banishing the thief of night for all but a dim hour or so from the dominion of his majesty. There is light on the islands, benign and irresistible, except for one or perhaps two shadowed hours in the cycle of twenty-four.

Something of this was in Joan's mind when she said over the marmalade

one morning, "Daddy, the day after to-morrow is Midsummer. Let's celebrate it properly."

"How, my dear?" asked Mr. Pomfret, putting down the toast which was within an inch of his mouth.

"By a midnight picnic. We'll spend the night on an island—on Eynhallow—and see the dawn come up before the after-glow is out of the sky. And we'll dance when the sun shows himself again."

"I haven't danced for years," said Mrs. Pomfret pathetically, "and don't you think the grass would be damp?"

"Tut!" said Mr. Pomfret. "Grass damp? Pouf!" Spousal resistance invariably excited him to action, and he had, it may be remembered, a sanguine nature.

"I should like a chance to watch the birds on Eynhallow," said Lt.-Commander Disney. "They're interesting in the early morning. And we could take plenty of rugs, and a flask, you know, in case it is cold."

"Of course we could." Mr. Pomfret was in a singularly euphonic mood that morning. He felt positively boyish. "Do you remember, Mother"—he called Mrs. Pomfret Mother when he felt particularly young and could think good-naturedly of her growing a little mature—"Do you remember that bicycling tour I did once in Cornwall? Excellent fun it was, Hugo. It must be twenty-five years ago, and I often wish that I had found an opportunity to repeat it. This idea of yours is splendid, Joan, my dear. Dancing to the Midsummer Sun—Ha! I shall show you all how to dance. Hugo, my boy, will you see about a boat?"

Eynhallow is a small uninhabited island between the Mainland of Orkney and the island of Rousay. It is surrounded by unruly tides, but to the fishermen who know them it is not difficult to land, provided the weather is calm. Those definitely in favour of the expedition were Mr. Pomfret, Lt.-Commander Disney, Joan, and naturally, since Joan would be there, Otto Samways. Mrs. Disney shrugged her shoulders and said, "It will mean the first late night I've had for a fortnight and the first woollen undies I've worn for years. I don't mind, though." Poor Mrs. Pomfret sighed and returned to *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

Hugo Disney persuaded a local fisherman, John Corrigan, that it would be more profitable than lobster-fishing to sail the Pomfret party to Eynhallow and call for them on the following morning, and so the preliminaries of the excursion were successfully completed. John Corrigan was privately convinced that they were all mad—except Mrs. Pomfret, whom he found to be an unwilling victim—but refrained from saying so, except in the privacy of his own family; for a madman's money is as good as that of a man dogmatically and indecently sane, and, indeed, more easily earned.

On Midsummer Eve then, after dinner, the Pomfrets set sail. They carried baskets of food, for a night in the open is a potent ally of hunger, but no instrument of fire, such as a primus stove, for that, Joan said, would be an insult to the omnipotence of the sun, who should rule alone. They took rugs and cushions, and Mrs. Pomfret wore a fur coat and Russian

boots. They set a portable gramophone—for they were to dance—in the stern of the boat, and Otto Samways carried two albums of records. There was a heavy cargo aboard when John Corrigan hauled his sheet and brought the boat's head round for Eynhallow. He landed them, without more incident than a faint protest from Mrs. Pomfret, on a shingle beach, and left them.

And that is the last that has been seen of them.

When Corrigan returned to Eynhallow in the morning, he found the island deserted. He shouted, and there was no answer, he walked round the island, which is small, and found no trace of the midnight visitors. He sat on a rock and struggled heavily with thought, and then, because he was anxious to get back before the tide turned, he sailed home again.

It is, of course, an ingrained belief in the mind of the northern Scot that the English are a flighty, unreliable race. They travel far from home when there is no need to travel, they are wantonly extravagant (John Corrigan had been paid in advance), and their actions spring from impulse instead of emanating slowly from cautious deliberation. They are volatile (as the English say the French are volatile), and their volatility makes them difficult to understand. So John Corrigan said nothing, except to his wife, of the disappearance of the Pomfrets. He had no intention of making a fool of himself by raising what was possibly a false alarm, and the whole day, which might have been profitably spent on investigation, was wasted.

In the evening the chauffeur, an energetic man when aroused, went to make inquiries, and was astounded to hear that his master had apparently vanished. With the decision of a man who had lived in cities and learnt, before he took to driving one, the art of evading motor-cars, he told a little girl who happened to be at hand to summon the village constable, and ordered Corrigan to make his boat ready for sea. The latter protested, for the wind and tide were at odds and a pretty sea was breaking round Eynhallow. But the chauffeur was like adamant, and drove the constable and John Corrigan to the shore, helped to push out the boat, and after a stormy crossing landed, wet through, on the island. A thorough search was made, and not a sign of the Pomfrets could be found; nothing, that is, except a little tag of bright metal which was found lying on the grass, the significance of which was unknown to Corrigan and the policeman, who had no experience of modern toilets, and to the chauffeur, who was virtuous and unmarried. Later it was identified simultaneously by the maids as the end, the catch or hatch as it were, of a stocking-suspender such as many ladies wear. If Miss Joan had been dancing vigorously, it might have sprung asunder from the rest of the article and fallen to the ground, they said.

The three maids became hysterical soon after they learnt of the mystery; John Corrigan went home to his bed, convinced that it did not concern him; the constable was useless, having encountered no such case in his previous professional experience; and it was left to the chauffeur to devise a course of action.

He persuaded the constable to cycle to Kirkwall, the capital and cathedral

city of Orkney, and report to such superior officers as he might discover there. He insisted on the local telegraph office opening after hours, and sent an expensive message to the newspaper which guided the thought and chronicled the deeds of the town in which Mr. Pomfret had prominently lived. And he made a careful inventory of everything that the unfortunate party had taken with them. Then he sat down to compose a long letter to the newspaper already mentioned.

The assistant-editor of the paper made instant and magnificent use of the chauffeur's telegram. Times were dull, and his chief was away on holiday. The chief sub-editor was a man of consummate craft and no conscience. Between them they splashed a throbbing, breath-taking story over the two main news columns. They flung across the page a streaming headline that challenged the hearts of their readers like a lonely bugle sounding on a frosty night. Eynhallow became a Treasure Island encircled by northern mists, and the sober citizens who read this strange story of the disappearance of people whom they knew so well (by sight), whose motor-cars they had envied, and whose abilities they had derided, felt creeping into their souls an Arctic fog of doubt, a cold hush of suspense, a breath of icy wind from the waste seas of mystery. Which was precisely the effect intended by the enterprising assistant-editor and the highly competent sub-editor.

This was the beginning of the story which subsequently took all England by the ears, and echoed, thinly or tumultuously, in ribald, hushed, or strident accents, in railway carriages and on the tops of buses, at street-corners and over dining-tables, at chamber-concerts and through brass-band recitals, in all places where two or three newspaper-readers were gathered together, and finally in one or two topically-inclined pulpits and behind the foot-lights of the variety stage.

The assistant-editor sent hurrying northwards a young and alert reporter, and it was not his fault that an emissary of a great London evening paper arrived in Orkney before him. For the latter travelled by aeroplane, the evening paper being wealthy and its editor having been noticeably impressed by the provincial report. The first general information, therefore, that Britain had of the Great Pomfret Mystery was a brightly written account of the long flight of Our Special Investigator.

Within twenty-four hours every self-respecting news-sheet in the country had published a map of Orkney, on which the approximate position of Eynhallow was surrounded by a black circle. The more erudite contributed brief historical sketches of the islands, and a few discovered that a church or monastery had once been built on the particular islet of mystery. Brief descriptions of Mr. Pomfret with at least the names, Christian names, and ages of his party appeared in all the papers. Two offered ready-made solutions to the problem, three laughed at it, and one rashly cited as a parallel case the vanishing crew of the *Marie Celeste*.

On the following day a Paymaster-Commander wrote to say that he had once, during the War, motored from Scapa to Swandale (Mr. Pomfret's

house), and distinctly remembered seeing Eynhallow. "A charming, seagirt, romantic-looking island," he wrote, "with the appearance of having withstood a thousand storms and blossomed with a thousand green springtimes." Subsequently an Admiral, who had also been in Scapa during the War, corroborated this, writing to say that he had seen the island himself. Thereafter its actual existence was not doubted.

In a short time photographs began to appear, photographs of Mr Pomfret and his family, one of Lt.-Commander Disney in uniform, and a charming picture of Miss Joan Pomfret playing in a local tennis tournament. The two reporters sent long descriptive stories about nothing in particular, and their respective sub-editors garnished them with suggestive and arresting headlines. Several papers remembered that the *Hampshire*, with Lord Kitchener aboard, had been sunk on the other side of Orkney, and "A Student of Crime" wrote to suggest that a floating mine, one of the chain responsible for that dire catastrophe, had survived to be washed up on Eynhallow, and had blown the Pomfrets into minute and undiscoverable fragments. No sound of an explosion, however, had startled Orkney, and no trace of such a convulsion was apparent on the island. A photograph of John Corrigan and his boat appeared, an artistic camera study with an admirable sky effect. Several stories of mysterious yachts cruising in the vicinity were mooted, and the yachts were all satisfactorily identified as trawlers.

On the second Sunday after the disappearance, when the mystery had been deepened by time and even the most ingenious could offer no likely solution, an eminent clergyman, a staunch supporter of temperance, publicly warned the country against the danger of owning breweries. Mr. Pomfret, he said, was widely known as a brewer, one who had made his fortune out of beer, that enemy of man and canker in the home. And Mr. Pomfret had disappeared. Divine vengeance, he said, cometh like a thief in the night. To-day we are here, in the midst of our wickedness, and tomorrow we are plucked up and cast into the oven. Let all, he concluded, who own breweries consider the appalling fate of George Plover Pomfret, and mend their ways by honest repentance while there is yet time.

And then the London paper had a scoop. Its reporter discovered that during all this bustle of conjecture, doubt and query, investigation and disappointment, a German professor had quietly been living, as a summer boarder, in a farmhouse not two miles distant from Swandale. His own explanation of his presence so near the scene of supposed tragedy was that he was collecting and examining survivals of Norse influence in the Orkney dialect; but his story, especially when it was printed alongside his own photograph, met with derisive incredulity, and in the natural excitement that followed this disclosure there was not a little sturdy denunciation of the Hidden Hand. The professor was detained in custody, and was released only on the telegraphic intervention of the German Foreign Secretary, who personally vouched for his honesty and innocence. This again deepened the suspicions of many newspaper readers.

The local police, meanwhile, reinforced by an inspector from Edinburgh and a detective from Scotland Yard, had quietly and systematically established that there were no clues to the whereabouts of Mr. Pomfret and his friends, and no solution to the mystery of their disappearance. It was impossible for anyone to get on to or off the island without a boat, and no boat could easily have landed, owing to the state of the tide, between the hour at which the Pomfrets were disembarked and the morning visit of John Corrigan. No strange vessel had been seen in the vicinity. The Pomfrets could not have made a raft, as some hundreds of people had suggested, because they had nothing out of which to make one, except two luncheon baskets, a gramophone, some records, and a box of gramophone needles which were, it must be admitted, too small to nail together pieces of driftwood, supposing suitable planks to have been present on the beach. Nor, unless they had been attacked by an epidemic mania, a surging and contagious Sinbad complex, was there any particular reason why they should have wanted to make a raft. No clear evidence even of their presence on the island, except an integral portion of a lady's stocking-suspender, was found, and some people suggested that John Corrigan was a liar and that the Pomfrets had never gone there. But the circumstantial evidence of the servants was in Corrigan's favour, and he had not, it was found, the mental ability successfully to dispose of six adult bodies.

Investigation of a practical kind came to an end. There was no one to question and nothing to find. Even the spiritualistic mediums who offered their services were of no real assistance, though some of them claimed to have established communication with Miss Joan Pomfret, who told them that everything was for the best in the best of all possible Beyonds. Mrs. Pomfret, it was reported, had said, "Sometimes it is light here and sometimes it is dark. I have not seen Bulmer, but I am happy." There was a little discussion on the significance of *Bulmer*, till a personal friend suggested that it was a mis-tapping for the name of Mrs. Pomfret's favourite author, but the general mystery was in danger of being forgotten, dismissed as insoluble.

It was about this time that Mr. Harold Pinto left Kirkwall in the Orkneys for Leith, sailing on the S.S. *St. Giles*. Mr. Pinto was a commercial traveller, more silent than many of his class, a student of human nature, and in his way an amateur of life.

When the *St. Giles* was some four hours out of Kirkwall he stepped into the small deckhouse which served as a smoking-room, and, pressing a bell, presently ordered a bottle of beer. There were, in the smoking-room, two other commercial travellers with whom he was slightly acquainted, the reporter of the provincial newspaper which had first heard of the Pomfret case, an elderly farmer who said he was going to South Africa, and a young, bright-eyed man, carelessly dressed, distinguished by a short, stubbly beard. He looked, thought Mr. Pinto, as though he might be a gentleman. His nails were clean; but his soft collar was disgustingly dirty and his clothes had evidently been slept in. He asked for Bass, at the

same time as Mr. Pinto, in an educated and pleasant voice, but when the beer came he merely tasted it, and an expression of disgust passed over his face. He took no part in the general conversation, though Mr. Pinto noticed that he followed the talk actively with his eyes—very expressive eyes they were, full, at times, of an almost impish merriment.

The conversation naturally centred round the Pomfret Mystery, and the reporter very graphically told the story from the beginning, embellished with certain details which had not been published. "There are some things," he said, "which I wouldn't willingly tell outside this company. It's my private belief that old Pomfret took drugs. Don't ask me for proof, because I'm not going to tell you. And there's another thing. Joan Pomfret once asked the gardener at Swandale—he's a local man—whether he knew of any really lonely places near by. The sort of places where there were likely to be no casual passers-by. I didn't send that piece of news to my paper because I'm still waiting for the psychological moment at which to make it public. But you'll admit that it's significant."

The other commercial travellers both contributed theories, at which the reporter scoffed, but Mr. Pinto was almost as silent as the young man with the beard.

"Mass suicide won't do," said the reporter, "however much you talk about crowd psychology; and mass murder, followed by the suicide of the murderer, won't do either. None of them was likely to run amok. And where are the bodies? One at least would have been washed up before now. No, it's my opinion that there's an international gang at the bottom of it, and one of the party—at least one—was either a confederate or a fugitive from the justice of the gang."

The man who was going to South Africa said that he had a cousin who had once disappeared in Mashonaland. He was about to tell the story more fully when the two commercial travellers and the reporter discovered that they were sleepy—it was nearly midnight—and went hurriedly below. And after a minute or two the man with the cousin in Mashonaland followed them.

The young man with the stubbly beard sat still, staring at nothing with eyes that were alert and full of comprehension. He seemed to be listening to the throb of the steamer's screw and the answering wash of the sea. His lips moved slightly when a wave, louder than the others, ran with a slithering caress along the ship's side, and he smiled engagingly, looking at Mr. Pinto as though he expected an answering smile.

"The Möder Di,"\* he said, "laughing at fishermen's wives. All summer she laughs lightly, but the laughter of her winter rut is like icebergs breaking."

Mr. Pinto, remarking that it seemed to be a fine night, stepped out on to the deck.

"Oh, a glorious night," said the young man with the beard, following him. "Look at the clouds, like grey foxes running from the moon!"

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\* Möder Di. The Ninth Wave.



"Indeed, there is one extraordinarily like a fox," replied Mr. Pinto politely.

"She is hunting to-night," said the young man. "Foxes and grey wolves. And see, there's a stag in the west. A great night for hunting, and all the sky to run through."

Mr. Pinto and his friend had the deck to themselves, and Mr. Pinto began to feel curiously lonely in such strange company.

"Listen," said the young man, pointing over the rail. "Do you hear a shoal of herring talking out there? There's a hum of fear in the air. Perhaps a thresher-shark is coming through the Firth."

Mr. Pinto, convinced that he had a lunatic to deal with, was considering an excuse for going below when the young man said: "I saw you sitting silent while those fools were talking about Pomfret's disappearance. Why did you say nothing?"

"Because I didn't think any of their theories were good enough," answered Mr. Pinto, feeling a little easier, "and because I had no theory of my own to offer."

"What do you think? You must think something?"

Mr. Pinto blinked once or twice, and then diffidently suggested, "'There are more things in heaven and earth,' you know; it sounds foolish, after having been quoted so often and so unnecessarily, but——"

"It does not sound foolish. Those others were fools. You, it seems, are not yet a fool; though you will be, if you live to grow old and yet not old enough. If you like, I will tell you what happened to George Pomfret and his friends. Sit there."

Mr. Pinto, rather subdued, sat; and the young man walked once or twice up and down, his hair flying like a black banner in the wind, turned his face up to the moon to laugh loudly and melodiously, and suddenly said: "They landed on Eynhallow in the quietness of a perfect evening. The tide was talking to the shore, telling it the story of the Seven Seals who went to Sule Skerry, but they could not hear it then. A redshank whistled 'O Joy! look at them!' as they stepped ashore. But they did not know that either. They made a lot of noise as they walked up the shingle beach and the rabbits in the grass, because they made a noise, were not frightened, but only ran a little way and turned to look at them."

"Mrs. Pomfret was not happy, but they let her sit on the rugs and she fell asleep. The others walked round the island—it is not big—and threw stones into the sea. The sea chuckled and threw more stones on to the beach; but they did not know that. And the sea woke birds who were roosting there, and the birds flew round and laughed at them. By and by the shadow of night came—it was not really night—and they sat down to eat. They ate for a long time, and woke Mrs. Pomfret, who said she could never eat out of doors, and so they let her sleep again. The others talked. They were happy, in a way, but what they talked was nonsense. Even Joan, who was in love, talked nonsense which she does not like to think about now."

"Then——," Mr. Pinto excitedly tried to interrupt, but the young man went imperturbably on.

"Disney said one or two things about the birds which were true, but they did not listen to him. And by and by—the hours pass quickly on Midsummer night—it was time to dance. They had taken a gramophone with them, and Joan had found a wide circle of turf, as round as a penny and heavenly smooth, with a square rock beside it. They put the gramophone on the rock and played a fox-trot or some dance like that. Disney and Norah Disney danced together, and Joan danced with Samways. Two or three times they danced, and old Pomfret made jokes and put new records on.

"And then Joan said, 'These aren't proper dances for Eynhallow and Midsummer Eve. I hate them.' And she stopped the gramophone. She picked up the second album of records and looked for what she wanted; it was light enough to read the names if she held them close to her eyes. She soon found those she was looking for."

The young man looked doubtfully at Mr. Pinto and asked, "Do you know the music of Grieg?"

"A little of it," said Mr. Pinto. "He composed some Norwegian dances. One of them goes like this." And he whistled a bar or two, tunefully enough.

The young man snapped his fingers joyously and stepped lightly with adept feet on the swaying deck.

"That is it," he cried, and sang some strange-sounding words to the tune. "But Grieg did not make it. He heard it between a pine-forest and the sea and cleverly wrote it down. But it was made hundreds of years ago, when all the earth went dancing, except the trees, and their roots took hold of great rocks and twined round the rocks so that they might not join the dance as they wished. For it was forbidden them, since they had to grow straight and tall that ships might be made out of them."

The young man checked himself. "I was telling you about the Pomfrets," he said.

"Joan found these dances that she loved, and played first one and then the other. She made them all dance to the music, though they did not know what steps were in it, nor in what patterns they should move. But the tunes took them by the heels and they pranced and bowed and jumped, laughing all the time. Old Pomfret capered in the middle, kicking his legs, and twirling round like a top. And he laughed; how he laughed! And when he had done shaking with laughter he would start to dance again.

"'This is too good for Mother to miss,' he said, 'we must wake her and make her dance too.' So they woke Mrs. Pomfret, and there being then six of them they made some kind of a figure and started to dance in earnest. Mrs. Pomfret, once she began, moved as lightly as any of them except Joan, who was like thistledown on the grass and moonlight on the edge of a cloud.

“ And then, as the music went on, they found that they were dancing in the proper patterns, for they had partners who had come from nowhere, who led them first to the right and then to the left, up the middle and down the sides, bowing, and knocking their heels in the air. As the tune quickened they turned sometimes head over heels, even Mrs. Pomfret, who held her sides and laughed to see old Pomfret twirling on one toe. And the gramophone never stopped, for a little brown man was sitting by it and now and again turning the handle, and singing loudly as he sat.

“ So they danced while the sky became lighter and turned from grey to a shining colour like mackerel ; and then little clouds like roses were thrown over the silver, and at last the sun himself, daffodil gold, all bright and new, shot up and sent the other colours packing.

“ And everybody shouted and cheered like mad, and for a minute danced more wildly than ever, turning catherine-wheels, fast and faster in a circle, or shouting ‘ Hey ! ’ and ‘ Ho ! ’ and ‘ Ahoi ! Ahoi ! A-hoi ! ’

“ Then they sank to the ground exhausted, and the Pomfrets looked at their partners who had come from nowhere ; and were suddenly amazed.

“ ‘ Well, I’m damned ! ’ said old Pomfret, and all the little brown men rolled on the grass and laughed as though they would burst.

“ ‘ Oh, they’re the Wee Folk, the Peerie\* Men ! ’ cried Joan, delightedly, clapping her hands. ‘ Peerie Men, Peerie Men, I’ve found you at last ! ’

“ And again the little men laughed and hugged themselves on the grass. By and by, still laughing, they drew together and talked among themselves very earnestly, and then the biggest of them, who was as tall as a man’s leg to the mid-thigh, went forward, saying his name was Ferriostok, and made a little speech explaining how delighted they were to entertain such charming guests on Eynhallow ; and would they please to come in for breakfast ?

“ Some pushed aside the stone on which the gramophone had been standing and, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, the Pomfrets went down rock stairs to a long, sandy hall, lit greenly by the sea, and full, at that time, of the morning song of the North Tide of Eynhallow. They sat down, talking with their hosts, and then two very old little men brought stone cups full of a yellow liquor that smelt like honey and the first wind after frost. They tasted it, curiously, and old Pomfret—he was a brewer, you know—went red all over and said loudly, ‘ I’ll give every penny I have in the world for the recipe ! ’ For he guessed what it was.

“ And the little men laughed louder than ever, and filled his cup again. One said, ‘ The Great King offered us Almain for it eleven hundred years ago. We gave him one cup for love, and no more. But you, who have brought that music with you, are free to our cellar. Stay and drink with us, and to-night we shall dance again.’

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\*Peerie. Little.

“ No one of them had any thought of going, for it was heather ale they drank. Heather ale ! And the last man who tasted it was Thomas of Ercildoune. It was for heather ale that the Romans came to Britain, having heard of it in Gaul, and they pushed northwards to Mount Graupius in search of the secret. But they never found it. And now old Pomfret was swilling it, his cheeks like rubies, because Joan had brought back to the Peerie Men the music they had lost six hundred years before, when their oldest minstrel died of a mad otter’s bite.

“ Disney was talking to an old grey seal at the sea-door, hearing new tales of the German war, and Joan was listening to the Reykjavik story of the Solan Geese which three little men told her all together, so excited they were by her beauty and by the music she had brought them. At night they danced again, and Joan learnt the Weaving of the Red Ware, the dance that the red shore-seaweed makes for full-moon tides. The Peerie Men played on fiddles cut out of old tree-roots, with strings of rabbit-gut, and they had drums made of shells and rabbit-skins scraped as thin as tissues with stone knives. They hunt quietly, and that is why the rabbits are frightened of silence, but were not afraid of the Pomfrets, who made a noise when they walked. The Peerie Men’s music was thin and tinkly, though the tunes were as strong and sweet as the heather ale itself, and always they turned again to the gramophone which Joan had brought, and danced as madly as peewits in April, leaping like winter spray, and clapping their heels high in the air. They danced the Merry Men of Mey and the slow sad Dance of Lofoden, so that everybody wept a little. And then they drank more ale and laughed again, and as the sun came up they danced the Herring Dance, weaving through and through so fast that the eye could not follow them.

“ Now this was the third sunrise since the Pomfrets had gone to the island, for the first day and the second night and the second day had passed like one morning in the sandy hall of the Little Men ; so many things were there to hear, and such good jokes an old crab made, and so shockingly attractive was a mermaid story that the afternoon tide told. Even the sand had a story, but it was so old that the Peerie Men themselves could not understand it, for it began in darkness and finished under a green haze of ice, and since the Pomfrets were so busy there they heard no sound of the chauffeur’s visit and the Peerie Men said nothing of it. They had taken below all the rugs and cushions and hampers and gramophone records, and brushed the grass straight, so that no trace was left of the Midsummer dancing—except the tag of Joan’s stocking-suspender, which was overlooked, so it seems.

“ The old grey seal told them, in the days that followed, of all that was going on by land, and even Mrs. Pomfret laughed to hear of the bustle and stir they had created. There was no need, the Peerie Men found, to make them hide when more searchers came, for none of the Pomfrets had any wish to be found. Disney said he was learning something about the sea for the first time in his life (and he had followed the sea all his life), and

Norah sang Iceland cradle-songs all day. Old Pomfret swilled his ale, glowing like a ruby in the green cave, and Joan—Joan was the queen of the Peerie Men, and the fosterling of the old grumbling sand, and the friend of every fish that passed by the sea-door. And at night they danced, to the music of tree-root fiddles and pink shell-drums, and above all to that music which you think was made by Grieg. They danced, I tell you! . . .”

The young man tossed up his arms and touched his fingers above his head; he placed the flat of his foot on the calf of the other leg; twirled rapidly on his toes. “Danced, I say! Is there anything in the world but dancing?” And he clapped his heels together, high in the air, first to one side and then to the other, singing something fast and rhythmic and melodious.

Mr. Pinto coughed nervously—he was feeling cold—and said: “That is an extraordinarily interesting story. But, if you will pardon my curiosity, do you mind telling me what reason you have for thinking that this actually happened to Mr. Pomfret and his friends?”

“Reason!” said the young man, staring at him. His hair blew out on the wind like a black banner, and he laughed loud and melodiously.

“This reason,” he said, “that I am Otto Samways!” And he turned, very neatly, a standing somersault on the deck and came up laughing.

“They sent me away to buy something,” he said, “and when I have bought it I am going back to Eynhallow to dance the Merry Men, and the Herring Dance, and the Sea Moon’s Dance with Joan.”

And once again he sang, very melodiously, and turned a rapid series of catherine-wheels along the deck.

“To buy what?” shouted Mr. Pinto, as he disappeared.

“Gramophone needles!” bellowed the young man, laughing uproariously.