

# *The Morgans of the Isle of Ushant*

There used to be (a very long time ago, so long ago, perhaps at the time when Saint Paul came from the country of Hibernia in our island), in Ushant, a beautiful young girl of sixteen or seventeen years, named Mona Kerbili. She was so beautiful that all those who saw her were struck with admiration, and said to her mother:

“You have a very beautiful daughter, Jeanne! She is as pretty as a Morganesse, and one never saw anything like that on this island; it would make one think that her father is a Morgan.”

“Do not say that,” replied the good woman, “because God knows that her father is very well Fanch Kerbili, my sailor, just as I am her mother.”

Mona’s father was a fisherman and spent most of his time at sea; her mother cultivated a small piece of land that she owned next to her house, or spun linen when the weather was bad. Mona went with the young girls her age to the beach, to search for *brinic*<sup>1</sup>, mussels, clams, snails, and other shellfish, which were the ordinary food of the family. One must believe that the Morgans, who were then very many in the island, had noticed and were, too, struck by her beauty. One day when she was, as usual, at the beach with her companions, they were talking about their suitors; each praised the skill of her own to catch fish and to steer and direct his boat among the numerous reefs by which the island is surrounded.

“You’re wrong, Mona,” said Marc’harit ar Fur to the daughter of Fanch Kerbili, “to reject Ervoan Kerdudal, as you do; he is a handsome guy, doesn’t drink, doesn’t quarrel with his friends, and no one knows better than he how to direct a boat through the difficult passes of the Old-Jument and the Pointe du Stiff.”

“I,” replied Mona with disdain—because by reason of being told she was pretty, she had grown vain and proud—“I will never take a fisherman for a husband. I am as pretty as a Morganesse, and I will marry only a prince, or at least the son of a nobleman, rich and powerful, or else a Morgan.”

It appears that an old Morgan, who was hiding there, behind a rock or under the seaweed, heard, and throwing himself upon her, he took her away to the bottom of the water. Her companions ran to tell the adventure to her mother. Jeanne Kerbili

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<sup>1</sup> Limpet shells.

was spinning on her doorstep; she threw her distaff and her spindle and ran to the shore. She called for her daughter out loud and even went in the water as far as she could go, at the spot where Mona had disappeared. But it was in vain, and no voice responded to her tears and to her cries of despair.

Rumor of Mona's disappearance spread quickly across the island, and no one was greatly surprised. "Mona," they said, "was the daughter of a Morgan, and it was her father who snatched her."

Her abductor was the king of the Morgans of these waters; and he took the young Ushantine to his palace, a marvel whose beauty could not be approached by even the finest royal houses on land.

The old Morgan had a son, the most beautiful of any of the Morgan children, and he fell in love with Mona and asked his father to let him marry her. But the king, who also had the same intentions with regards to the girl, replied that he would never agree to let his son take a wife who was a daughter of men of the land. There was no shortage of beautiful Morganesses in his kingdom who would be happy to have him as a husband, and the king would give his consent when his son made a choice.

And now the young Morgan was in despair. He replied to his father that he would never marry if he were not allowed to marry the woman he loved, Mona, daughter of the earth.

The old Morgan, seeing him perish of sadness and grief, forced him to marry a Morganesse, daughter of one of the greatest of his court and who was renowned for her beauty. The wedding day was set, and many people were invited. The bride and groom set off for the church, followed by a magnificent and bountiful procession; so it seems that these men of the sea also have their religion and their churches under water, just like the rest of us on earth, although they are not Christians. They even have bishops, we are assured, and Goulven Penduff, an old sailor of our island, who has sailed all the seas of the world, assured me that he has seen more than one.

Poor Mona was ordered by the old Morgan to stay at home to prepare the wedding feast. But she was not given what she needed to do this, absolutely nothing but jars and empty pots, which were large marine shells, and he still said that if everything was not ready and if she did not serve a great meal when the wedding party returned from the church, she would be put to death immediately. Imagine her confusion and her sorrow, poor girl! The groom himself was neither less confused nor less sorrowful.

As the procession was marching toward the church, he suddenly exclaimed: "I forgot my bride's ring!"

"Say where it is, and I'll get it," his father said to him.

“No, no, I will go there myself, because no one aside from me will be able to find it where I put it. I will run there and I’ll be back in an instant.”

And he went, without allowing anyone to accompany him. He went straight to the kitchen where poor Mona wept and despaired.

“Cheer up,” he said, “your meal will be ready and cooked to perfection; just have faith in me.”

And approaching the fireplace, he said: “Good fire in the fireplace!” and the fire was kindled and blazed immediately.

Then, touching in succession with his hand the pots, pans, skewers, and plates, he said: “For the salmon flesh in the pot, the sole with oysters in the other, the duck on the skewer here, fried mackerel there, and selected wines and liquors, and the best in these jars...” And the pots, pans, plates, and jars filled themselves by enchantment with food and liquor, as soon as he touched them with just his hand. Mona could not overcome her surprise at seeing the meal ready, in a wink of an eye, and without that she would have been killed.

The young Morgan then rejoined, in all haste, the procession, and they went to church. The ceremony was performed by a sea bishop. Then they returned to the palace. The old Morgan went straight to the kitchen, and addressed himself to Mona:

“We’re back now; is everything ready?”

“Everything is ready,” Mona replied, quietly.

Surprised by this response, he uncovered the pots and pans, examined the plates and the jars and said, with an air of dissatisfaction, “You have been helped; but I will not have you leave.”

They sat at the table; they ate and drank plentifully. Then the songs and the dances continued all night long.

Around midnight, the newlyweds retired to their wedding chamber, beautifully decorated, and the old Morgan told Mona to accompany them there and to remain there, holding a lighted candle in her hand. When the candle was consumed up to her hand, she would be put to death.

Poor Mona had to obey. The old Morgan stood in an adjoining room, and, from time to time, he asked, “Is the candle consumed up to your hand?”

“Not yet,” replied Mona.

He repeated the question several times. Finally, when the candle was almost entirely consumed, the new husband said to his young bride, “Take, for a moment, the candle from Mona’s hands, and hold it while she lights a fire for us.”

The young Morganesse, who was unaware of the intentions of her father-in-law, took the candle. The old Morgan repeated his question at the same time: “Is the candle consumed up to your hand?”

“Answer yes,” said the young Morgan.

“Yes,” said the Morganesse.

And immediately the old Morgan came into the room, threw himself on the one holding the candle, without looking at her and chopped off her head with a stroke of his sword, and then he went away.

As soon as the sun rose, the newlywed went to his father and said, “I come to ask permission to marry, my father.”

“Permission to get married? Were you not married yesterday?”

“Yes, but my wife is dead, my father.”

“Your wife is dead!...You killed her, wretch?”

“No, father, it is you yourself who killed her.”

“Me, I killed your wife?...”

“Yes, my father: last night, did you not, with your sword, chop off the head of the one who held a lighted candle, near my bed?”

“Yes, the daughter of the earth?...”

“No, my father, it was the young Morganesse that I had to marry to obey you, and I’m already a widower. If you do not believe me, it is easy to verify this for yourself, as her body is still in my room.”

The old Morgan ran to the wedding chamber and knew his mistake. His anger was great.

“Who do you want to have as a wife?” He asked his son, when he was somewhat appeased.

“The daughter of the earth,” my father.

He did not answer and went off. However, after a few days, understanding how it was probably unreasonable to act as the rival of his son for the young girl, he gave his consent, and the marriage was celebrated with pomp and solemnity.

The young Morgan was full of attentions and kindnesses for his wife. He fed her small delicate fish, which he caught himself. He fashioned ornaments of fine pearls and sought pretty pearly golden shells for her and the most beautiful and rarest marine plants and flowers. Despite all this, Mona wanted to return to the land, to her father and her mother in their small cottage by the sea.

Her husband would not let her go, because he feared she would not return. She then fell into a great sadness, and cried day and night. The young Morgan said to her one day, “Smile at me a little, my sweet, and I will take you up to the house of your father.”

Mona smiled, and the Morgan, who was also a magician, said, “*Bridge Rail, rise.*”

And at once a beautiful bridge of crystal appeared, to go from the bottom of the sea to the land.

When the old Morgan saw it, sensing that his son knew magic, indeed, just as long as he, he said, “I also want to go with you.”

All three of them entered upon the bridge, Mona in front, her husband after her, and the old Morgan a few steps behind them.

As soon as the first two dismounted, the young Morgan said, “*Bridge Rail, lower.*”

And the bridge descended back to the bottom of the sea, carrying with it the old Morgan.

Mona’s husband, unable to accompany her to her parents’ house, let her go alone while following these recommendations: “Come back at sunset; you will find me here, waiting for you; but do not let yourself kiss or even hold the hand of any man.”

Mona promised, and ran toward the house of her father. It was dinnertime, and the whole family was gathered.

“Hello, mother and father; hello brothers and sisters!” she said, entering hastily into the cottage.

The good people looked at her, astonished, and nobody recognized her. She was so beautiful, so great and so adorned! This pained her, and tears came to her eyes. Then she began to walk around the house, touching each object with her hand, saying: “Here is the sea stone on which I sat, at home; here is the little bed where I slept; here is the wooden bowl where I ate my soup; there, behind the door, I see the broom of Genet with which I swept the house, and here, the pitcher with which I went to draw water at the fountain.”

On hearing all this, her parents eventually recognized her and kissed her, weeping with joy, and they were all happy to be back together.

Her husband had instructed Mona not to allow any man to kiss her, and from that moment, she completely lost the memory of her marriage and her stay among the Morgans. She stayed with her parents, and the suitors did not fail her. But she hardly listened to them and did not wish to marry.

The family had, like all the inhabitants of the island, a small piece of land, where they put potatoes, some vegetables, a little barley, and that was enough for them to live with the daily contribution taken from the sea, fish, and shellfish. There was in front of the house an area to beat the grain, with a millstone of barley straw. Often, when Mona was in bed at night, through the roar of the wind and the muffled sound of the waves beating on the shore rocks, she thought she heard wailing and moaning at the door of the house; but, convinced that it was the poor souls of the castaways, who asked for prayers from the forgetful living, she recited some *De profundis* for them, sympathized with the sailors who were at sea, and then she fell asleep peacefully.

But one night, she distinctly heard these heartrending words spoken by a plaintive voice: “Oh Mona, have you so quickly forgotten your husband the Morgan who loves you so much and who has saved you from death? You had

promised to come back without delay; you have made me wait so long, and you render me so miserable! Ah! Mona, Mona, have mercy on me, and come back soon!”

Then Mona remembered everything. She got up, went out and found her husband the Morgan, who moaned and lamented so, near the door. She threw herself in his arms...and since then, she has not been seen.

Told by Marie Tual on the island of Ushant, in March 1873.  
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