

## **The Lantern on the Hill**

The wind swept gently across the emerald fields, rustling the long grass in waves that mimicked the rolling sea. On the hill overlooking the small Irish village, a solitary lantern flickered in the encroaching dusk. It had been there for as long as anyone could remember, casting its golden glow across the moors.

Maeve tightened her shawl against the breeze as she ascended the hill. She came here every evening, just as her grandmother had, and her grandmother before her. The villagers spoke of the lantern's light as a guardian of sorts, a beacon for lost souls wandering too far into the mist. But to Maeve, it was something far simpler: a reminder of the stories whispered to her as a child.

Tonight, the air felt heavier, as though the earth itself was holding its breath. Maeve reached the summit and placed her hand on the lantern's cool metal frame. Her reflection shimmered faintly in the glass, her auburn hair catching the fading sunlight. The flame danced inside, alive and yet contained.

"Still shining," she whispered, as though speaking to an old friend.

Her grandmother had told her that the lantern never needed tending. Its fire burned with the will of the land itself, ignited by the hopes and dreams of the people below. Maeve had always dismissed the tale as a bit of folklore, a charming story to lull her to sleep. But as she stood there now, she felt a warmth not from the flame, but from within.

The mist began to rise, curling like silver threads around her ankles. Down in the valley, lights from the village began to blink on, tiny stars scattered across the earth. Maeve lingered, lost in thought until a voice broke the stillness.

"You're here again."

She turned to see Finn, the shepherd, his face creased with a familiar smile.

"Can't help myself," she replied. "It feels like the hill calls to me, especially on nights like this."

Finn nodded, his own gaze fixed on the lantern. "There's something about it, isn't there? As if it holds all our stories, waiting to be told."

Maeve smiled at that. "Maybe one day, someone will tell ours."

The two stood together in comfortable silence, the lantern's light casting long shadows across the hill. Below, the village thrummed softly with life, the echoes of laughter and music drifting upward.

As the mist thickened and the night deepened, the lantern on the hill continued to shine, its glow a quiet reminder of the resilience, love, and stories that bound them all together.