

The Iron Hag

and Other Stories from the
Sam Henry Collection

by Colin Urwin

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Front cover image: Illustration by Eileen-Marie Emerson

Back cover image: Sam Henry at Dunluce Castle, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum

Book design and layout by Colin the Designer
Printed in Northern Ireland

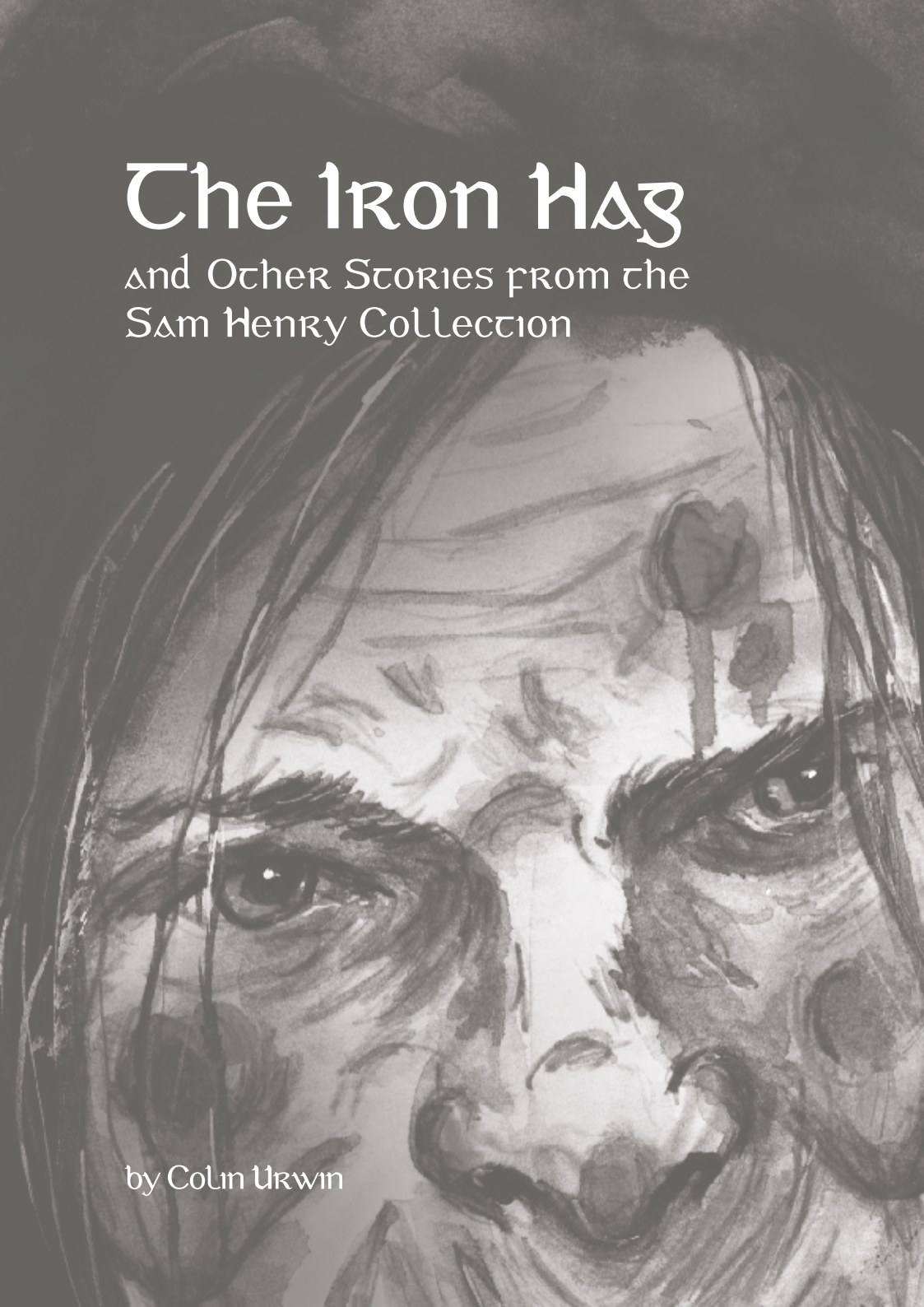
ISBN 978-1-3999-4716-9

This publication is part of the Sam Henry: Connecting with the Past, Collecting for the Future project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Association and administered by the Museums Association.

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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I welcome this collection of stories gathered by Sam Henry, which have had new life breathed into them by storyteller, writer and singer, Colin Urwin.

Sam Henry was best known as a collector of songs, but some years ago, thanks to my work with Causeway Coast and Glens Museum Services, I was also introduced to the stories and folklore he gathered during interviews with local people. While the tales themselves contained some real nuggets, the language in which they were originally recorded would these days appear a bit archaic and difficult to follow. When telling them I found myself having to adapt and change bits to suit the ears of a modern-day audience.

How wonderful then that Colin Urwin was commissioned to make this collection accessible to all. As a man born and bred in County Antrim, he has a real feel for the spoken language of the place, the dialect, and the landscape. Already steeped in the songs collected by Sam Henry, Colin's familiarity with placenames and the flora and fauna of his home ground shines through in his adaptations of these stories. As an experienced storyteller he has sensitively modified the tales to make them easier to follow, strengthening their impact while being faithful to the sense of the original versions.

Our stories are constantly changing and are meant to be told. This collection presents us with the opportunity to enjoy tales which might otherwise never be read or spoken. The voices of those who have gone before us will once again be heard. I believe that Sam Henry would concur with me that the stories so generously shared with him were placed in the safe hands of a talented local storyteller. Colin Urwin's work will ensure that these tales will be enjoyed by future generations.

Liz Weir MBE

Cushendall, Co Antrim

January 2023

Introduction

Sam Henry (1878-1952), from Coleraine on the banks of the River Bann, was a customs and excise officer, a pensions officer, an antiquarian, a lecturer, an author, a photographer, an ornithologist, a folklorist, a musician and, perhaps most famously, a collector of folksongs. He was much more besides.

When Sarah Calvin of Causeway Coast and Glens Museum Services asked me to bring together some of the stories he had collected and reimagine them, I was of course delighted. I was already quite familiar with the name of Sam Henry and having been a lifelong singer of folk songs, I have a much loved and well used copy of Sam Henry's *Songs of the People*. As a storyteller, I was also vaguely aware that Sam had collected some other material, and had published various humorous anecdotes, folktales and local histories in several books and pamphlets.

Before I began my research, I wanted to get inside the mind of the collector whose stories I was being asked to reimagine. To this end, I trawled through the Sam Henry Collection of which there are some 15,000 items carefully catalogued and digitised. Among these documents and artefacts I found, to my great delight, a kindred spirit. Sam Henry was a man with whom I shared not only a love of song, traditional music and folklore, but also history, archaeology, landscape, nature and talking to people.

Like me, Sam Henry loved where he lived and, whether it was in a newspaper column, a schoolroom, a village hall, or the windswept ruins of a local castle, he loved to share his various passions with audiences of all ages.

Sam was born in 1878 and, from a folklorist's point of view, he was fortunate indeed to have lived at a time when the oral tradition was alive and well, and the people still possessed a wealth of songs and stories. Likewise, as a keen birdwatcher and naturalist, he enjoyed a countryside as yet unravaged by modern farming techniques and industrial forestry. Sam could not have foreseen the demise of species like the Corncrake, the Grey Partridge and the native Irish Grouse which were all so familiar in his day. We can well imagine these losses would have saddened him greatly. Sam might have had some vague awareness that an era was coming to an end but, as with the local fauna, I doubt he had any real concerns for the long-term survival of our folklore and culture.

When collecting songs, anecdotes and folktales, I think Sam was much less concerned with saving them from passing into oblivion than collecting them for their own sake and, of course, to expand his personal repertoire. Sam made good use of the material he collected, often recounting humorous anecdotes and snatches of songs to intersperse lectures, talks and radio presentations.

Talking to Ballymena Rotary Club in 1944, Sam professed, "One of my hobbies is just to go round looking for stories, looking for fun, and I get it afresh every time."

Suffice to say, although Sam was a prolific collector, he did not approach the task in any serious academic way. He was simply drawn to characters and the craic!

One character who appears in Sam's writings and photographs time and again is Katie Glass from Rathlin Island. This old woman was very likely the source of most, if not all, of the stories in this book. In writing it, many times

have I thought how amazing it would have been to have sat by her fireside, drinking tae and listening to her tales. What a treasure trove of folklore she must have been. But it has also occurred to me how many more stories old Katie might have had that Sam never got around to recording – we shall never know. Nevertheless, for the few delightful folktales Katie Glass passed onto Sam, we must be very grateful. Without his foresight and efforts, some may have been lost forever.

As steeped in the old ways as Sam was, he did not shy away from new technology. When cameras became widely available, he embraced the opportunity eagerly and turned out to be quite a talented photographer. Similarly, in the pioneering days of local radio, Sam was one of the very first to take to the airwaves. Radio proved to be the perfect medium for Sam to share his love of Irish folklore, wit and wisdom more widely.

Having lived through the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, I doubt Sam would have been very surprised by the Covid pandemic and all the trials that came with it. That said, I imagine he would have been intrigued, and delighted, by what was essentially a global revolution in the virtual sharing of songs, stories and friendship. Sam would surely have loved the idea that, from the comfort of my study in Co. Antrim, I told the story of Molly McAnulty which he collected almost a century ago, into my computer camera which served as a portal to an audience with members as far away as the United States and Australia. I too love that idea!

In those strange days of lockdown, the internet became a lifeline to thousands of storytellers, songsters and musicians worldwide, and the phenomenon of the virtual ceilidh has, I'm glad to say, survived the pandemic and is here to stay.

Of course, it is not the same as a live audience in a school or a public house or even a theatre, but then these stories started life being told around the home fires to family, friends and neighbours. They have come with us on our journey through the ages and into other venues and spheres. A virtual audience, though not to every storyteller's liking, is just another step along the way.

What Sam Henry might think of my tinkering with his stories, I cannot be certain. I hope he would approve and accept that tastes and attitudes change over time. Sam's publications were not subject to any stringent editing process, and his delightfully flowery language, punctuated by his own peculiar sense of humour and frequent meanderings can, at times, be difficult to follow.

I have edited the stories with the express purpose of making them much more accessible and engaging for the modern reader but also, I hope, more appealing to the contemporary teller of folktales. I have taken the liberty of making slight alterations to the behaviour and motivation of some characters and, occasionally, the severity of retribution that befell them when it seemed unnecessarily harsh to me. Lastly, I retitled some of the stories – in some cases purely for aesthetic reasons and in others to veil the plot to the end.

The stories represented here are my own interpretations and although I have used other sources to illuminate certain scenes I have, by and large, tried to stay faithful to the versions set down by Sam Henry.

Ultimately, to view his original renderings for interest and comparison, readers can access the Sam Henry collection on the Northern Ireland Community Archive website via www.niarchive.org.

I am indebted to Liz Weir MBE for writing the foreword to this book and much else – she is an inspiration to me and many others. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Stephanie Hanson-Kelly and Joanne Honeyford for their much needed proofreading skills. For her beautiful cover design, I heartily thank artist and illustrator Eileen-Marie Emerson.

I am very grateful to Dr Nicholas Wright, Community Outreach Officer and Rachel Archibald, Museum Officer for keeping an eye on progress. Rachel's technical assistance, specialist knowledge of the Sam Henry collection and helpful suggestions have been invaluable. Without her contribution this book would not have been possible.

Finally, my thanks go to Sarah Calvin, Museum Services Development Manager, who put her faith in me to bring this project to a successful conclusion.

It has been a labour of love.

Colin Urwin
Munie Moss
Glenarm
January 2023



Sam Henry with Katie Glass
on Rathlin Island, Sam Henry
Collection, Coleraine Museum

Finvola of the Four Sows

Rathlin Island lies on the north coast of Ireland, just a few short miles off Ballycastle. For centuries her people have endured harsh ocean winds, rough seas, famine and massacres. The island's history is long and its folklore rich.

Being treeless, firewood on the island was as rare as gold, but turf, the staple of hearths the country over, was rarer still. Islanders have always been resourceful though, and to heat their homes and cook they burned driftwood, heather and dried animal dung, at least until the arrival of coal.

Long, long before that, however, on a day of days there were three sisters who lived on that barren island. They were all called Finvola, which means fair-shouldered maiden. Odd as it might seem to us now that three sisters should bear the same name, in those far off days it was common enough.

The oldest sister was known as Finvola Fionn – fair shouldered maiden of the fair hair. The middle sister was known as Finvola Dun – fair shouldered maiden of the brown hair. And the youngest sister was called Finvola de na gceithre cránacha – fair shouldered maiden of the four sows.

One morning they found that they were in need of some brushwood to light the fire. Being busy with looking after the swine, the youngest sister could not go. Between them the two older sisters argued and eventually agreed that Finvola Fionn should go and fetch some.

She went to a neighbour – The Hen Wife as she was always known – and asked for some kindling.

“Surely,” said the old wise woman, “but first will you comb my hair dearie and scratch my back for me?”

Finvola Fionn looked at the old woman's matted grey hair crawling with lice. She imagined her old wrinkly flaking skin hidden by the filthy shawl and, turning up her nose, said,

“I will not.” And away she went home without the kindling.

“Where is the brushwood you went for?” her sisters asked.

“I would rather starve of the cold than be a handmaid to that old hag!” Finvola Fionn cried, and that was that.

So Finvola Dun went to ask The Hen Wife for some kindling.

“Surely,” said the old wise woman, “but first will you comb my hair dearie and scratch my back for me?”

Finvola Dun looked at the old woman's matted grey hair crawling with lice. She imagined her old wrinkly flaking skin hidden by the filthy shawl and, turning up her nose, said,

“I will not.” And away she went home without the kindling.

“Where is the brushwood you went for?” her sisters asked.

“I would rather starve of the cold than be a handmaid to that old hag!” Finvola Dun cried. And that was that.

At last, Finvola of the Four Sows went to ask The Hen Wife for some kindling.

“Surely,” said the old wise woman, “but first will you comb my hair dearie and scratch my back for me?”

“I will of course,” said the youngest Finvola, and she took a comb and began to clean and untangle the old woman's hair. When she had combed out all the tats and braided her long grey strands, she took the shawl from round her shoulders and scratched and rubbed her back just like she often did with her four sows. All the while The Hen Wife grunted and moaned with pleasure.

“Thank you, dearie,” said the old wise woman and she gave Finvola of the Four Sows a great big bundle of kindling.

“Come back to me next Sunday morning and I will have something better by far than dry heather roots for ye. Come early mind, for ye don’t want to be late for mass.”

The following Sunday it was whispered that the chieftain’s son would be at church. This was an opportunity not to be missed by all the young women of the island who had a fancy for him. They combed and braided their own hair and dressed themselves in what finery they had. Down they flocked to their place of worship where the priest was surprised to find the pews taken up so early.

Finvola of the Four Sows, however, was so busy combing The Hen Wife’s hair and scratching her back that she almost forgot about her religious duties, and the chieftain’s son! But then suddenly the old wise woman bid her away. Before she let young Finvola depart, however, she bestowed on her a gift. It was a beautiful pair of delicate glasslike slippers, the like of which no one had ever seen.

“Wear these into the church dearie, they will bring you great good fortune.”

And so away like the wind ran Finvola of the Four Sows. She reached the church just before the mass started, put on her slippers at the door and took her place on the family pew beside her two older sisters. As she did so, the chieftain’s son looked around. The moment he laid eyes on young Finvola his heart leapt sideways. She was as beautiful as a rose; her lips were the colour of the rowan berry and when she sang her voice was as pure as strained honey. Throughout the service he turned his head often to catch the eye of the youngest Finvola, but she was always engrossed in the liturgy and seemed not to notice him.

In those days the Latin mass was long and dreary and as

the priest began his lengthy sermon, Finvola slipped out and ran home to tend her four sows. In her haste to steal out of church without being noticed, she left one of her slippers behind. The chieftain’s son had not noticed Finvola leave, and he was distraught to find her place empty. When the mass eventually ended the young man enquired for her. Finding the shoe she had left behind, he searched the whole island high up and low down for the maiden whose foot the tiny shoe would fit.

Footsore and weary, the chieftain’s son eventually came to the cabin of the three Finvolas. While the two eldest sisters eagerly took their turn at trying the slipper and so be claimed as his wife, the youngest Finvola was locked out with the four sows. Their efforts were all in vain and, in his anguish, the young man cried aloud,

“Is there not one on this island can tell me to whom this slipper belongs?”

“There is no one else here, my lord,” answered the sisters as one. But then a faint cry was heard,

“Finvola Fionn, Finvola Dun unlock this door and let me out!”

Of course Finvola of the Four Sows was soon discovered. Even as she emerged from the pigsty, she was more beautiful than the young man had remembered in his imagination. The delicate glasslike slipper, the like of which no one had ever seen, was a perfect fit for her dainty foot.

It was whispered that the older Finvolas died of grief and shame, but the truth is that their youngest sister forgave them both. They were allowed to live in peace on Rathlin for the rest of their days, though it is said they never married.

Finvola of the Four Sows and the chieftain's son, however, became man and wife. In time, the son inherited his father's kingship and Finvola became a much-loved queen. Side by side they ruled over their lands and their clan with great wisdom and fairness. The Hen Wife was among their chief advisors.

And it was always said of Queen Finvola of the Four Sows that she was never without her swine, that she never ate pork and that she went to mass every Sunday.

The Queen of Mountsandel

The mighty River Bann flows right through the middle of Lough Neagh and the province of Ulster, emptying out into the Atlantic Ocean on Ireland's north coast. About five miles from its mouth, and a mile south of Coleraine Town, is a place called Mountsandel. It is the site of the earliest known inhabitants of Ireland and dates back nine millennia. People have lived at Brugh-na-Bann - Banks of the Bann - continuously for all that time.

There were fierce rapids here at one time which for sixteen hundred years were known as Eas Craoibhe - The Waterfall of Creeve. This is the story of how that beautiful place is said have got its ancient, and modern, name.

Twenty-two centuries ago, from his seat on the Hill of Tara, the High King of Erin, Lugaid Luaigne, ruled uneasily over many chieftains and their clans. There was constant quarrelling between neighbouring clans, and alliances were often being made and broken. In Ulster, two chieftains shared the governance of the province - Congal Cláiringnech, who had his seat at Emain Macha (Navan Fort, Armagh) in the south, and Fergus mac Léti quartered at Dundabheann (Mountsandel) in the north.

But the men of Ulster took exception to being ruled over by two chieftains. Congal and Fergus bowed to the wisdom and judgement of the High King, Lugaid. He favoured Fergus mac Léti with whom his daughter had been betrothed. The old king reasoned that an alliance strengthened by marriage would bolster his own position. He tried to pacify Congal by offering him more lands and riches, but Congal had been

slighted and his fury knew no bounds.

Congal and Fergus both called on their many allies, and a terrible battle ensued with great losses on both sides, but outright victory could not be claimed by either. Congal went to Lochlann (Norway) to seek help and returned to Erin with a great army. Among other acts of terrible violence, he marched on Tara and defeated the High King Lugaid, beheading him on the battlefield. After his triumph, Congal installed himself at the Hill of Tara as the High King.

Fergus mac Léti eventually made peace with his one-time enemy and offered his allegiance. Congal accepted but stripped Fergus of his kingship and established his brother at Emain Macha as King of all Ulster.

Now High King of Erin with his brother in charge of the most influential province, and strong alliances made in Connacht, Leinster, Scotland and Lochlann, Congal was at the height of his powers. But, like most powerful men, he could not be satisfied.

In the north another chieftain, Niall of the Shining Deeds, had taken over the mighty fort - Dundabheann - at Mountsandel. His wife Craoibhe was said to be very beautiful and, together with Niall's reputation as a great warrior and chieftain, his possessions and position attracted the resentment and jealousy of Congal.

The High King resolved to march on the stronghold of Niall of the Shining Deeds, rob him of all his wealth and power and, all being well, take Queen Craoibhe as his own wife - whether she agreed or not.

It was said that an army of three thousand warriors amassed on the green to the east of Dundabheann, which was garrisoned by less than two hundred brave warriors.

Niall of the Shining Deeds and his men fought valiantly and, even when the palisades had been breached and burned, they carried the fight to their enemies. Before they were hacked down, they slew many of Congal's warriors. Eventually they were overcome by strength of numbers and every last one of Niall's men were slain in bloody battle.

The mighty fort at Mounsandel - Dundabheann - on the banks of the Bann was reduced to ashes. Nothing was left standing. Everything that was once owned by Niall of the Shining Deeds and his men was plundered as the spoils of war: chariots, horses, bridles, clothes, animals, broaches cups, plates, goblets, and all manner of treasure. Swords and battle axes, even chessboards and chess pieces, dice and every trifling possession that could be found was seized.

And then all the fair-skinned young women, including Queen Craoibhe were taken as wenches and wives for the pleasure of their captors. There was great weeping and wailing, and none wept more tears and wailed louder than Craoibhe.

"A graveyard now is Dundabheann, where once sat mighty kings," she cried. "Its fame was great abroad, but this day it has become a desert."

Recognising Craoibhe as the woman of high birth that she was, Fergus mac Léti, now fighting as an ally of Congal, offered her his protection and surrendered his share of the spoils to have her released into his charge.

But as soon as Craoibhe was unfettered, she declared her undying love for her husband, Niall of the Shining Deeds, and there and then threw herself into the rapids at Brugh na Bann where she was drowned. And so ended another tragic episode in the long running drama that was played out for centuries in ancient Ulster.

For sixteen hundred years that place was known as Eas Craoibhe - The Waterfall of Creeve. And it might still be popularly known as that today but for the march of progress. The rapids at Eas Craoibhe prevented goods being shipped up and down the river Bann. In the 1660s the Honourable Irish Society funded a project to cut a channel through the rock and create lock gates to make the river navigable from Coleraine all the way to Lough Neagh.

Since then, the place has been known locally as The Cutts,

and the facts concerning its creation are doubtless of great interest to local historians. The gory spectacle said to have taken place here so many centuries ago, culminating with the grief and sacrifice of that ancient Celtic Queen, faded into obscurity and have almost been forgotten.

And that is a sadness in itself, for how much more romantic and stirring to the blood are the age-old, and once venerated, stories like the one behind the name of Eas Craoibhe - The Waterfall of Creeve, told by the seanchaí, generation after generation, by the flickering glow of a peat fire flame.



The Brave Spalpeen

Daniel McAllister had been to war. He had seen things no young man should ever have to witness – things that would have put a lesser man wrong in the head. He had seen young men mown down in terrible fashion, he had heard the murderous roar of cannons, and men crying out for their mothers in mortal agony.

Daniel had been wounded himself. He had been heart scalded. His very soul had been torn asunder, but still his hands remained rock steady. He had been blessed with the grace of an easy mind and nerves of steel, and that's what had saved him. There was nothing in this world or the other that held any fear for him now.

When he returned to Ireland after the war, he took to the roads – not as a tramp but as a spalpeen – a man who travelled through the countryside in search of work. He could turn his hand to haymaking, potato gathering, ploughing, anything that would earn him a few shillings and a bed for the night in barn or byre.

One day he stopped at a large farm to enquire if there were any chores the farmer was wanting done. It was an old ramshackle of a place and Daniel could see there was a mountain of work to do. The farmer seemed very anxious,

“Many a good fella has come before but has never stayed for long,” he said.

“Why so?” asked Daniel, and the farmer began to tell his woes.

“The place is haunted by three ghosts,” he said, “anyone who comes about the place is always so terrified they take the

road and never come back.”

“I see,” said Daniel, “and when do these ghosts appear?”

“Every night they come,” said the farmer. “Be my guest, but I warn you they are not friendly ghosts.” Then the farmer showed Daniel to the ruins of an old castle that overlooked the farm.

“This is where they appear,” he said. “Every night, without fail, on the stroke of midnight they come. They howl and screech and never a night's sleep can I get and never a hired man can I keep. If you want to stay, you're welcome. If you can lay these ghosts to rest I'll gladly bestow you half of the farm, and all the silver and gold you'll ever need or want.”

“Could you spare me a bite of meat now,” said Daniel, “while I think about your offer?”

The farmer brought him into the kitchen where his daughter was baking soda bread on the griddle. She was about the same age as Daniel and, although she was careworn, she was very beautiful. Daniel could not take his eyes of her.

“Martha is my only daughter,” said the farmer, “Her mother died years ago. I'd be very loathed to lose her. She is all the company and help I have.”

After he had eaten, Daniel told the farmer he was willing to try his luck.

“I will need a bottle of whiskey and four tumblers. And I need four pipes and enough tobacco to fill them. Bring me kindling to make a fire and enough turf to see me through the night.”

The farmer did as he was asked and showed Daniel to the castle – such as it was. The roof was falling in and the wind whistled through the place. There was neither window nor

door and even in broad daylight it was a cold and eerie place.

Daniel lit a fire in the old hearth, and the smoke began the drift up through the great crumbling chimney. He poured himself out a tumbler full of whiskey, but he never let it touch his lips for he wanted to keep his wits about him. He set three more tumblers out and prepared the pipes with tobacco. Just as it was getting dark, he lit his own pipe and began drawing on it as he waited for the witching hour.

Sure enough, on the stroke of midnight he heard an unearthly screech. Daniel had slept on many a battlefield and in many a barn and byre. He had heard some strange noises in his time - from man and beast. Even so, the wailing and howling he heard this night made his hair stand on end. Daniel didn't know whether it was a banshee, a ghost or a devil. Many another would not have stayed to find out, but he was as dauntless a boy as ever lived in Ireland, and he stood his ground.

The next thing a scrawny pair of legs began to appear down through the chimney into the flames of the fire. Then the hips and the waist, and the chest and arms, and finally the head of an old man appeared. He was ancient - long white strands of hair and hardly a tooth in his old gob. His eyes were black empty sockets, and his nose was all but gone, giving him the appearance of a skull. And all the while he was howling and moaning as if the fire was scalding his leathery old skin.

Eventually he drifted out from the fire and seemed to float in front of Daniel, and the smoke from the fire clung about him. The next thing, another pair of legs began to appear, and another wraith descended in similar fashion. And when it had taken its place before Daniel, a third appeared. The three ghosts hung there looking down at Daniel with their black

empty eye sockets, howling and moaning and screeching. It was a dreadful sight and a terrible sound, but Daniel was not moved at all.

"Sit down gentlemen. You must be tired after your travels," he said, but taking Daniel's words as an insult their antics didn't get bad to that. The ghosts flew up in a rage and swirled around that empty ruin of a castle. They toppled stones and smashed old roof timbers. The local people said the noise of howling and screeching coming from the castle that night could be heard for miles around, and the whole townland shivered in their beds. But Daniel remained as cold as a stone.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen please, come down out of that and sit yourselves by the fire," he said, and with his steady hand, Daniel poured out three glasses of whiskey and sat back to see what would happen.

Well, those three ghosts went tearing and smashing round that place. They dragged up sulphurous hideous creatures from hell. They paraded putrefying, ragged corpses before Daniel. I tell you, the things that Daniel saw that night would have put a lesser man wrong in the head. But after the things he had seen in the war, there was nothing in this world, or the other, that held any fear for him.

Before the night was out, that old ruin of a castle was in need of more repairs than it had been before. But no matter what those ghosts got up to, Daniel stood his ground. In fact, he didn't stand, he just sat there, puffing away on his pipe and sipping on his whiskey.

When it seemed that those ghosts had done their worst, and had run out of ideas and otherworldly energy, Daniel said for the third time,

“Would you ever come down out of that gentleman, please, and sit yourselves down by the fire?” This time his words seemed to have the desired effect. As one they swirled down from around the rafters of that old castle and took their place by the fire in front of Daniel. He raised his tumbler,

“Slainte,” he said, and put the whiskey to his lips. To his amazement, the three ghosts did likewise. They remarked on the fine drop of liquor it was and how long it had been since they had tasted anything like it.

“You’re very welcome,” said Daniel, and offered them a pipe apiece. Very soon they were puffing away on them like good ones, and the smoke was coming out their eye sockets and other places too.

Then Daniel said,

“Now gentlemen, would you ever tell me the meaning of all this hullabaloo every night?”

The ghosts started and told Daniel their long story.

“We three are the father, and the grandfather, and the great grandfather of the farmer down there. We took over this old castle many years ago and, generation after generation, built this place up from nothing. We lived for gold and making money. We reaped where we had not sown. We robbed our neighbours and took advantage of every poor man that ever crossed our paths. In the afterlife we were condemned to restlessness for all eternity, or until we could make good on all our trespasses. We have never found a living soul, not even our foolish son, who could be trusted to put right all our wrongs.”

Well, they talked most of the night and, to cut a long story short, Daniel agreed to help the ghosts. They told him where to find a secret cache of gold buried in the ground, and they

asked him to undertake the task of repaying every man they had ever robbed or wronged – dead or alive. True to his word, Daniel did this to the very last farthing.

The farmer was, after some encouragement from his daughter and Daniel, good to his word too. He bestowed Daniel half of the farm and paid him handsomely. After a suitable courtship, Daniel asked for Martha’s hand in marriage. She and her father agreed. Martha proved to be a most agreeable and loving wife and Daniel was the happiest man that ever married a woman.

Together they worked their half of the farm and, in time, inherited the rest of it. They had many children and, by example, always showed them how to be kind and generous to their neighbours. Very often, on a moonlit night, Daniel would hear strange noises coming from that old, ruined castle. When he went to investigate, he sometimes saw three white owls screeching and hissing as they flew around and perched on the battlements, but never another ghost did he ever see.

And I don’t know for sure, because I wasn’t there myself, but they say Daniel and Martha McAllister, and their family lived happily for many years after.

The Three Princesses of Knocklayde

Near the town of Ballycastle, Knocklayde Mountain rises from the surrounding countryside and maintains a vaguely brooding presence. It is a long slow traipse to the summit no matter which direction it is climbed from. At just under seventeen hundred feet, it is, in reality, more of a large, rounded hill than a mountainous peak.

Nevertheless, on a clear day its great domed mass, topped with a cairn, still offers spectacular views of Rathlin Island and the Paps of Jura to the north, the broad back of Slemish where St. Patrick once tended his master's flocks to the south, and to west the Derryveagh Mountains of Donegal with Mount Errigal shining like a beacon. It is closely flanked by Glentaisie to the west and Glenshesk to the east, the two most northerly of the Antrim Glens.

In years gone by, what a lookout point it must have been for the old chieftains of Dal Riada to survey their lands or watch for approaching enemies. The High King of Ulster once had his northern stronghold not far away at a place called Carey, the shortened modern version of Cahir Righ an Uladh - the Fort of the King of Ulster. It was always a place of great strategic importance. Many were the bloody battles that were fought around its slopes. But these are stories for another time.

The famous Black Nun, Sheelagh Dubh, who is said to still haunt the nearby Bonamargy Friary, forewarned that the hill contained a great volume of water, and that one day it would

burst and flood the countryside for seven miles around. On days when the heavens open over the blue hills of Antrim and rivulets rush down from the top of Knocklayde in every sodden direction, it does appear to be leaching water from within.

There are even claims that in the 18th century Knocklayde erupted and a great flow of molten lava engulfed a small village, or clachan, called Ballyowen. On the face of it, this seems too far-fetched to have even slightest toe hold in reality, but a landslide or, more accurately, a peat-slide, the like of which has been chronicled in other glens, may have been the source for this local legend.



Knocklayde is a mountain possessed of many mysteries and much forgotten history. But perhaps the most intriguing and enduring mystery, is the summit cairn that sits like a nipple on a breast - and may even have been intended to give that appearance by our ancient ancestors worshipping nature gods we can only imagine.

There are many early monuments; dolmens, tombs and standing stones in the surrounding countryside but the cairn atop Knocklayde remains intact and invites wonder.

Shrouded in the mists of time, as obscure as the actual mists that often swathe Knocklayde, history cannot provide us with a completely satisfactory explanation for the existence of the cairn. But myth and legend often afford more than just bare facts, and it is here we should look to sate our hunger for a story to tell.

In the old days when Cormac Mac Airt was the High King of Erin, Fionn mac Cumhaill was the leader of that band of fearless warrior poets known as the Fianna. Many are the stories that are still told the length and breadth of Ireland, of the most famous of their number - Fionn himself, Oisín, Oscar, Dairmuid and many more. Lesser known, but no less brave, were three young warrior brothers, Ger, Glas, and Gabha.

It was not uncommon for the young men of the Fianna to attract the affections of equally young women of high birth, and so it was with Ger, Glas, and Gabha. An Alban chieftain, Iruath MacAlpine, father of Nabgodon who would later become King of Lochlann (Norway), also had three beautiful daughters - Muireoc, Aoife and Aillbhe. At a clan feast, or some other observance, for the Fianna were well travelled and usually welcome at any revelry in Erin and Alba, the three brothers somehow met, and fell in love with, the three sisters.

For a full score of years, their courtship grew but never bore fruit. No marriages were ever consented to or arranged. But then Muireoc, Aoife and Aillbhe eloped across the Sea of Moyle to Erin and, upon landing, went to the highest point to look for their lovers. When they reached the top of that bleak rounded hill they were suddenly overcome by a powerful fit of weariness and all three lay down and fell fast asleep, as if dead to this world.

It so happened that Ger, Glas, and Gabha, along with their comrades in arms, were away in the province of Leinster, far to the south, where they were embroiled in a fierce and bloody campaign.

Many warriors were slain, and the Fianna counted and mourned their losses.

In deep slumber, Muireoc, Aoife and Aillbhe each dreamed of their sweethearts. But harbingers of doom came to them, and their dreams soon turned to ghastly nightmares. Visions of Ger, Glas, and Gabha lying bloodied and maimed on the field of battle appeared to them. As quickly as they had fallen into an enchanted sleep, the sisters awoke. Of course, they were distraught and began to bewail their great loss and sadness. It was said that all three died on the top of that hill, their hearts broken by grief.

They were entombed where they lay and, for all we know, are still under that great cairn of stones for it has never been disturbed. For centuries after, Knocklayde was known by two names Cnoc an Triúir - The Hill of Three Persons, and Cnoc na Mairge - The Hill of Woe. And the memory of this tragedy in the form of Mairge or Margy echoes locally to this day in the names of Bonamargy Friary and the Margy River which flows out at Ballycastle.

And that is the sad story of the three Princesses who rest eternal beneath the cairn on top of Knocklayde. If it is not true, do not hold me to account. I did not make the story up, but merely pass it on.



The Last of the Fianna

The Fèinne, or Fianna, were once a small but fearsome band of warrior poets led most famously by the great Fionn mac Cumhaill. They lived by three deeply held principles: Purity of hearts. Strength of limbs. Deeds to match words.

During the wintertime the Fianna were sheltered and provided for by local chieftains in return for keeping law and order among the clansmen and for protection against enemies and marauders. During the plentiful summer months, the Fianna preferred to fend for themselves, roaming the countryside in search of places to hunt, food and adventure, of which they found plenty wherever they went.

One of the most highly regarded qualities for an aspiring warrior of the Fianna was his aptitude and passion for hunting – deer, wild boar and hares being among their favourite prey. Not only did this pursuit provide the men with great feasts but they thrived on the thrill of the chase.

One day the men of the Fianna were hunting on Rathlin Island, even now a well-known haunt for hares, but the sport was poor owing to there being a great dearth of hares in Erin and Alba that year. Just as darkness was coming on and the hunters were despairing of a meal for the night, a fine big hare started up out of the heather. The cries of excited men and the yelps of eager hounds echoed across the island.

The hare jinked this way and that as if teasing the hounds and escaped their jaws time and again. Just as the party was catching up with the hare and its capture seemed all but assured, the creature came to a strange water hole.

The surface was all of gold and honey and underneath was wine-red blood. In the hare plunged and disappeared from sight.

Oisín was first to the well and in the heat of the pursuit he plunged in after the hare and sank down into its depths. Next to arrive was Fionn, soon followed by the others. They all saw the blood swirl up to the surface as the honey sank down. Fionn cursed himself for not being at the head of the hunt as he usually was.

“I never knew there could be so much blood in a hare,” said one.

“It is not the blood of the hare,” said another, “this must be an enchanted well.”

“Indeed, it is so,” said Fionn, the wisest of them all. “The hare was but a dream, as hard to catch as the mist on the hill. This is the Well of Life; half honey and half blood – half sweetness and half tragedy. And now I fear we will never see my son Oisín again.”

Oisín sank down through the watery depths and gasping for breath was at last washed out onto the shore of the western ocean. It was there a woman mounted on a pure white stallion came galloping toward him from out of the wild waves. Her long blonde hair trailed out behind her on the wind and her eyes danced and shone like two blue stars. She was the most beautiful woman Oisín had ever seen.

“My name is Niamh of the golden hair,” she said, “I have travelled far from Tir Na-Og and I have come for the love of you Oisín.”

“Me?” said Oisín. “I’m sad to say that I have never laid eyes on you until this moment.”

“Tis true,” she said, “but I have dreamed of you and that

we might be joined together in marriage." Well, Oisín was instantly taken by Niamh so beautiful was she.

"I am truly honoured," he said, "here and now, I pledge my love to you."

"Come with me then," she said.

Oisín mounted the stallion behind Niamh and the animal leapt into the vastness of the western ocean. They met with many strange adventures along their way, but eventually came to Tir Na-Og.

"Did I not tell ye the truth my love?" said Niamh, "have ye ever seen such beauty?" And indeed, Oisín had not, nor such plenty for all the trees hung with fruit and the rivers ran with silver and gold.

The couple were married and for three hundred years they lived contentedly, though to Oisín it only felt like the turning of three short years. And they might have been happy for all eternity, but Oisín began to pine for Erin. He missed the Fianna and most of all his father, Fionn mac Cumhaill.

"I want to return to my home one last time," he said to Niamh.

"No, my love. Erin has changed since the days of the Fianna. A new religion has swept aside the old ways. Your father and all you knew are gone."

"Fear not Niamh," he said. "Your horse knows the way. He will bring me back safely to you I swear."

Eventually, Niamh relented, "Very well," she said, "but promise me that you will not let your foot so much as touch the soil of Erin, for if it does you can never return to Tir na-Og."

Three times she made him promise and three times he laughed off her concerns.

"I promise my love. I will return."

"I fear you will not," she said, and she kissed Oisín as she had done on their wedding night.

The next morning Oisín set out. The stallion was as fast and straight as a well thrown spear. Soon he found himself back on the shores of Erin. Never dismounting from the stallion, he searched all his old haunts in every corner of Erin. Not a trace of his father or the Fianna could he find, except that the people he met told stories and sang songs about the heroes from long ago.

Looking out over the sea from Fairhead towards Rathlin, Oisín had to accept that his father and all his old companions were dead and gone. With tears in his eyes and his heart weighing like a stone, he turned the stallion and began to retrace his steps back to Tir na-Og.

He hadn't gone far when he came upon a crowd of people. When they saw him, they were awed by his great stature.

"Help us please!" they called to Oisín, "we cannot move this stone ourselves." Oisín could see they looked underfed and feeble, so he rode among them. Leaning out of his saddle he reached down a hand to move the stone. As he did so the girth strap gave way and to save himself Oisín leapt from the saddle.

The white stallion reared wildly and galloped away. Oisín stood for a moment. It felt good to have his feet planted on solid ground once more. But then he remembered the words of Niamh, 'If your foot so much as touches the soil of Erin you can never return to Tir na-Og.'

The moment that thought passed through his mind Oisín began to stoop. He dropped to his knees and the flesh fell from his bones. His skin dried and shrivelled like an autumn

leaf, and his hair turned pure white. To the bewilderment of the people looking on, he became an old blind man too weak to stand.

Oisín died, but not before he told his story to a man the people revered as the father of their new religion. His name of course was Patrick. They buried Oisín on a windswept hillside in the townland of Lúb an tSámhais (Lubitavish) which means Mass Loop – the place overlooking a bend of the beautiful Glenann river where, perhaps, Patrick himself celebrated a funeral mass. It is one of the most romantic and peaceful places in all of Antrim's glens.

A few standing stones are all that remain to mark his resting place, but to this day people still cross over the weeford and climb the steep hill to come and pay their respects and lament the passing of the greatest warrior poet of them all – Oisín, the last of the Fianna.



The Iron Hag

There was once an old woman in the Glens of Antrim who was said to practise the darker arts. She lived in a rusty old iron hut with an iron stove on which bubbled and simmered iron pots of goodness-only-knows-what. Her teeth were crooked and stained, and they looked like old rusty iron nails. And around her neck was an iron chain that was red with rust. All the people roundabout called her The Iron Hag.

She lived by eating the animals of the woods. She robbed wee bird nests of their eggs and ate frogspawn with a spoon like other folk eat porridge. Everyone was terrified of her, and few ever ventured near her abode on the edge of the woods. Parents told their children stories of how she liked to eat little boys and girls and so, even at the sight of her, they ran for their lives. Any misfortune that came about the place was blamed on The Iron Hag, but such was her fearsome reputation that the people never dared go near her.

One day, the Iron Hag was gathering firewood deep in the woods when she came across a strange looking wee fellow. He was small and fat with spindly arms and legs, and a beard like a goat. On his face played a mischievous grin and his bright eyes danced with devilment.

“What is your name?” said the Iron Hag, her mouth watering with delight.

“My name is Plummacan,” said the wee fellow very politely.

“And do you live hereabouts?” she enquired.

“I do,” he replied.

“All alone in the woods?”

"Well, I have the birds and the beasts for company," said Plummacan.

"And tell me, where is your abode?"

Plummacan pointed through the hazel and the holly and birch trees, and The Iron Hag had to squint her old eyes to see a wee wooden shack at the foot of an ancient oak tree covered with moss and ivy.

"That is where I lay my head and you are welcome any time."

"Ah, thank ye Plummacan," she said, "I will call with ye another time, sooner maybe than later." And with that, The Iron Hag lifted her bundle of firewood and away she went.

By the time she got home she had already made up her mind to return to Plummacan's dwelling in the woods. But first she set the fire blazing in her iron stove. On it she set the biggest iron pot and filled it with water. Then she took a sack and hid it in under her cloak, and away with it she went.

It was straight back to Plummacan's shack in the woods she wended her way, carefully trying not to step on a branch or a twig so as not to make a sound. When she got near the little wooden house, the smell of wood smoke met her. When she got to the door, she never knocked but just called, "Plummacan. I'm here!" as she birlled on in.

Plummacan nearly jumped a foot in the air.

"I never heard you coming," he said trying to regain his composure, but The Iron Hag never answered, she just went straight to the fire and began to warm her backside.

"I'm very cold," she said.

"I can see that," said Plummacan. "It is the shortest, darkest day of the year, you know."

"Indeed, it is," she said, "and a gentleman would offer

his coat, or a blanket to put over the shoulders of a lady and warm her back."

"Aye, but I'm no gentleman," said Plummacan wryly, "and you're no lady!"

With that, The Iron Hag snatched Plummacan up by the scruff of the neck with her big bony hand and stuffed him into the sack.

"I'll put some manners into you," she said, and threw the sack over her shoulder. As she walked back through the wood, she cackled and sang:

Plummacan, Plummacan's for the pot

I'll eat him cold, or I'll eat him hot.

I'll pull his legs and arms apart.

I'll eat his liver, and eat his heart...

The Iron Hag was as strong as two men and she never tired of carrying Plummacan, for the more he was stout he was small.

"You're not going to eat me, are you?" said Plummacan.

"Bones and all. Bones and all," cackled The Iron Hag.

"Well, I won't make a very tasty meal," said Plummacan, "if you let me go, I'll take you to a big hare sitting in her form. She would make a much tastier meal than me."

"If I were to let you go, you'd be away and I'd neither have you nor the hare. Take me to the hare first and then I might let you go."

So Plummacan made a little hole in the corner of the sack. With his finger, he directed The Iron Hag to where a beautiful big hare lay in her form. Her huge eyes were staring, and her nose was twitching.

The Iron Hag snatched the hare up by the ears and with her big bony hand she stuffed it into the sack along with

Plummacan. And as she walked along, she cackled and sang:

Plummacan, Plummacan's for the pot

I'll eat him cold, or I'll eat him hot.

I'll pull his legs and arms apart.

I'll eat his liver, and eat his heart...

"I won't make a very tasty meal," said Plummacan, "if you let me go, I'll take you to where a squirrel has hidden two quarts of hazel nuts."

"If I were to let you go, you'd be away and I'd neither have you nor the nuts. Take me to the nuts first and then I might let you go."

So Plummacan made the hole in the corner of the sack a little bigger. With his hand, he directed The Iron Hag to where a squirrel had hidden two quarts of hazel nuts among the roots of a big hazel tree. She gathered them all up with her big bony hand and stuffed them into the sack along with Plummacan and the hare. And as she walked along, she cackled and sang:

Plummacan, Plummacan's for the pot

I'll eat him cold, or I'll eat him hot.

I'll pull his legs and arms apart.

I'll eat his liver, and eat his heart...

"The sack must be very heavy now," said Plummacan, "with me and the hare and two quarts of hazel nuts." And, in truth, even The Iron Hag was beginning to tire.

"If you let me go, I'll take you to where a holly sapling grows as straight as a rush. It would make a great staff for you and ease your burden."

"If I were to let you go, you'd be away and I'd neither have you nor the holly staff. Take me to the holly sapling first and I might let you go."

So Plummacan made the hole in the sack even bigger. With his arm, he directed The Iron Hag to the holly sapling. When she saw it growing straight as a rush, she said, "The best time to cut a stick is when you see it," and she began to chop it down herself.

While she was chopping and hacking, Plummacan made the hole in the sack big enough that he could squeeze his little fat body out.

Then he filled the sack with stones and, with all the hazel nuts in his pockets and the hare under his arm, he was away like lightening before The Iron Hag noticed he was gone.

All the way home she cackled and laughed and sang her song, and when she got there the big black pot of water was boiling and steam was billowing out her front door. The Iron Hag stuck her holly staff in the ground and went inside. She tipped the sack into the boiling water, but the moment the stones hit the bottom of the pot it cracked open. Water and steam and stones gushed out all over The Iron Hag. Well, she jumped ten feet in the air and let out a scream that soured milk for miles around. She took off like a scalded cat through those woods and for all I know she is running yet.

Plummacan took the hare back to her form and smoothed her ears down along her back. He put the hazel nuts back where they belonged and covered them over with leaves, for he was the guardian of the woods you see. Then he went back through the hazel and the holly and the birch trees to his own wee shack at the foot of an ancient oak tree covered with moss and ivy, and they say he lives there to this very day.

The Iron Hag's old iron hut and her iron stove and iron pots eventually all rusted away. She was never heard tell of again. But if ever you come across a holly tree growing as

straight as a rush in the woods, it might just be the one that old woman stuck in the ground all those years ago. You could be standing in the exact place where she once stood. If you are, make sure and look over your shoulder, for Plummacan might just be watching you.

DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS

It was in the days when the High King of Ulster, Conchobar Mac Nessa, ruled from his stronghold Emain Macha – Navan Fort. His bard was a man called Fedlimid mac Daill, and long had he and his wife yearned for the music of a child’s laughter to break the silence of their marriage. But he was full of days, and his wife was past the age of bearing children. They had at last given up the hope.

But then one day, Fedlimid was overjoyed to learn that his wife was with child. The news spread throughout Emain Macha, and beyond. Eyebrows were raised, of course, but though everyone talked, and asked how this could be, still they rejoiced for the old couple.

Even before the child was born, King Conchobar’s most trusted Druid Cathbad foretold a girl child. He went out into the night and from the strands of starlight he wove a prophecy of her fate.

“She will grow to be the most comely daughter of Erin,” he said, “her beauty will be the envy of queens, and the ruin of chieftains, and so will she beget sorrow, not just for herself, but for all of Ulster.”

When the child was delivered of her mother’s womb, she was given the name Deirdre na mbrón – Deirdre of the Sorrows.

King Conchobar’s warriors called for her destruction. Chieftains, more concerned with the survival of their kingdom than the lives of a thousand infants, would have there and then put the child to the sword. But so aroused was King Conchobar by the promise of her great beauty that

he decreed,

“I will rear her to be my bride!”

Deirdre of the Sorrows was taken away across the Moor of Loneliness, to a fort deep within the wild wood inhabited by wolves, wild boar and red deer, and there she was nursed by a wise woman.

The only man Deirdre ever laid eyes on was the steadily aging King Conchobar. Without fail, he came to see her once a week for the first seven years of her life. He had ordered that there should never be a mirror for her to gaze upon her own beauty and all other visitors were forbidden. As Deirdre grew to womanhood and her beauty deepened so too did King Conchobar’s desire to have her for his wife. Yet for all his imaginings and scheming, Deirdre did not return his passion.

One winter’s day, as Deirdre looked out into the woods from the only opening available to her, she saw a raven feeding at carrion in the snow.

“Would it be that I could love a man whose heart was as pure as the snow, whose hair was as black as the raven’s wing, and whose cheeks were as rude as that blood,” she carelessly whispered.

Time passed, and the man of Deirdre’s destiny and of her dreams soon appeared. His name was Naoise. Along with his brothers Ainlé and Ardán, they were the sons of Uisneach and his wife Ebhla, sister of the famed warrior Cú Chulainn – The Hound of Ulster and leader of the Red Branch Knights. The sons of Uisneach had come to Ulster from Alba years before as youngsters to be schooled in the martial arts by their famous uncle.

In time, they had grown to love Erin as much as their native home and had taken their place among the warriors

of the Red Branch.

Some say that Deirdre used some womanly guile to entrap Naoise, but in truth, a mere glimpse of her beauty beguiled all men. Deirdre and Naoise fell for one another the moment their eyes met. It was Ainlé who secretly joined them in matrimony. Under a vaulted cathedral of ancient oak trees, he bound their hands together.

“By the sun and the moon and the stars I join thee in wedlock, Deirdre and Naoise. May the air bless you and the rain and the wind and the sea.”

But behind every tree in the forest, there were prying eyes. King Conchobar soon discovered he had been duped by the young lovers. Although it was ordered that upon the death of Cú Chulainn, Naoise was to become the leader of the king’s warriors, Conchobar’s jealousy and fury knew no bounds and he craved Naoise’s destruction. Flanked by Ainlé and Ardán, the brothers made an inseparable trio of fearless warriors, of whom it was said the mere mention made whole armies shudder. But in truth, they could never stand against the might of Conchobar Mac Nessa who could call on many allies and spies. There would be no peace for them in Ulster.

It was on Deirdre’s counsel that they fled to Alba where she hoped they might find some stillness and solace. On a fine summer’s day, accompanied by fifty loyal warriors in a little galley, they put out from the port at Torr Head, the closest point to Alba. They sailed across the Sea of Moyle not knowing where they might land.

Eventually they came to the Isle of Mull. There they were greeted by Angus, the King of Alba. The moment he laid eyes upon Deirdre, he became entranced by her beauty and lusted

after her. Naoise quickly learned that his host was plotting to win Deirdre by foul means, and so they were forced to flee.

They settled at place called Glen Etive where the brothers had spent their happy childhood in the shadow of the mountain Buachaille Etive Mòr – the Great Herdsman of Etive. Here, as in former days, they speared salmon in the river and hunted stags in the forest. Along the shore they gathered shellfish and seaweed, and they lived blissfully and in perfect harmony with their wild and beautiful surroundings.

Often Naoise spoke to Deirdre of his love for her and for mother nature.

“In the blue of the sea and the sky,” he told her, “I see your eyes. In the rowan berries I see your sweet lips, and in the brown rushing water of the mountain streams on which the sunlight dances and sparkles, I see your tumbling hair.”

Naoise was a contented man. Conchobar Mac Nessa, however, was not! His jealousy and anger had long festered. He was consumed by his desire to have Deirdre at whatever cost. He sent Fergus mac Róich as an envoy with the promise of forgiveness, to lure the runaways back to Ulster from their vast mountain retreat in Argyllshire.

The Sons of Uisneach were overjoyed by the proposal, for they had long suffered pangs of yearning for Ulster and their comrades of the Red Branch Knights. Deirdre alone was wary, but Fergus’ reputation as the most honest and honourable of warriors swayed her.

Fergus escorted Deirdre and the sons of Uisneach back to Torr Head on the Antrim coast of Ulster, but King Conchobar had him forestalled and led away on a fool’s errand. Still Naoise and his brothers did not detect the whiff of treachery, for in his stead Fergus sent his own two sons as protectors.

When the party arrived at Emain Macha, so eager was King Conchobar to know if Deirdre's beauty had faded in the years that had passed, that he made a spy of her old nurse. In an attempt to dampen her master’s jealous obsession and save Deirdre from his clutches she told him,

“Deirdre has become grey with age and is haggard.”

Distrusting of her, Conor sent another spy but, as Naoise and Deirdre played chess together, he was discovered. Naoise threw a golden chess piece and took the man’s left eye out of its socket. In agony, and still bleeding from the wound, the spy ran to his master.

“My lord I am half blinded,” he said, “but I swear, so beautiful is Deirdre still, that I chanced another glimpse with my one good eye.”

The next day, all were assembled at Emain Macha and at the heart of the gathering were Deirdre and the Sons of Uisneach nervously awaiting the avowal of their reconciliation with King Conchobar.

Instead, he issued a stern command. Deirdre was seized and, despite a ferocious battle, Naoise, Ailé and Ardán were all mortally wounded. Of Fergus mac Róich sons, one sided with those he had been charged to protect, the other with his king, and their family was riven forever.

In the end, many warriors lay dead and dying, and Emain Macha was aflame. Seeing the life drain from her beloved Naoise, Deirdre broke free and ran to his side.

With his last breath he said, “The day will come when you can look up and hear the lark sing at the edge of the sky and the cuckoo among the willows. You will find love again.”

“If I lived another ten lives, I could never love anyone but you,” she cried and, taking a blade from Naoise grip, she

plunged it into her heart. Deirdre ended her own suffering, but not before she saw the near destruction of Emain Macha and the great King Conchobar Mac Nessa a broken man, forsaken as he was by his most trusted druids and warriors.

The three Sons of Uisneach were buried in one grave and there they lay, side by side in death as they had been in life. Deirdre's body was put into the ground nearby, and if all the stars and all the trees could have died for sorrow, it is surely a black sky, and a naked earth they would have had in Erin that night.

It was said that in time two mighty oak trees grew from each of their graves and that their limbs reached out until they were entwined. They stood as one for a thousand years. And for as long as the grass grows and trees shed their green leaves in autumn, the people of Erin will tell the tragic story of the once beautiful and beguiling, Deirdre of the Sorrows.



Queen Taisie

In his dealings with Niall of the Shining Deeds and his poor wife Craoibhe, who took her own life at Brugh na Bann, Congal Cláiringnech, the High King of Ireland, appears as a brute. But he was a man of the brutal and patriarchal times in which he lived. In those far off days, dowries and powerful political alliances played a more important role in matrimony than love, notwithstanding the beauty and desirability of the women in question, and the affection that often grew after marriage.

Following the events at Eas Craoibhe, we find Congal betrothed to the princess Taisie. She was the daughter of Donn, King of Rathlin, whose stronghold stood on the northern edge of the island and guarded the approaches from Lochlann (Norway). No doubt the old chieftain was very happy to have his daughter marry the High King of Ireland, and likewise Congal was securing a strong alliance with a small, but strategically important, chieftain and domain.

In the meantime, away to the north in Lochlann, King Nabgodon's wife Bedid had fallen ill and died. The Norse king was sick with grief at her loss. His warriors took it upon themselves to seek for him a new bride. They set sail and whether guided by good fortune and fair winds or skilful navigation, in time they pitched up on the shores of Rathlin Island.

There they spied the Princess Taisie surrounded by a retinue of young ladies. She was schooling them in the art of embroidery and needlework.

Among them she stood out as a star when only one is

shining in the sky. She was a beauty. Her primrose-coloured hair fell in curling tresses about her shoulders and her eyes shone a bright sapphire blue. Her voice was as melodic and as soothing as the song of the blackbird. Not only that, but the Princess Taisie was of a bloodline that stretched back to the Tuatha Dé Danann – the People of the Goddess Danu. The Norsemen had found their king the perfect bride.

King Donn of Rathlin hosted his Norse visitors cordially enough, but in the end had to tell them, “I am thankful for your proposal. King Nabgodon is a great man, but the Princess Taisie is already betrothed to Congal Cláiringnech, High King of Ireland.”

“King Nabgodon is indeed a great man,” said the envoys, “he will come with a mighty fleet to demand Taisie’s hand. Better you had given it freely now.” And they left in a rage of displeasure, determined to make King Donn rue the day.

The Norsemen returned to Lochlann to tell Nabgodon of the Princess Taisie’s great beauty and allure, and of the slight dealt to them by King Donn. Nabgodon raised a mighty fleet and amassed his warriors ready to attack Rathlin and avenge the offence. He meant to take Taisie as his bride whether she liked it or not.

King Donn knew he could not defend Rathlin against the strength of a Lochlann fleet and the fury of Nabgodon so he sent word to his future son-in-law. The gory dealings with Niall of the Shining Deeds, and the drowning of Craoibhe, had not long taken place and Congal, such was his desire for power and renown, was eager for new adventure and conquests. He was already preparing ships to go to Rathlin and claim his bride and dowry.

When Congal arrived and heard the news that the

Norsemen had been thwarted in their efforts to take Taisie from under his nose, he knew Nabgodon would come. The chance for more bloodshed and great glory was being presented to him on a plate. While they waited for the arrival of the Norsemen, Congal’s warriors feasted and revelled, but at last the Norsemen approached.

Not expecting Congal’s army of warriors, a vanguard of three ships came ashore but they were cut down like corn as they made landfall. Nabgodon followed with his full fleet and a furious battle ensued. As the fighting raged, and warriors were being hacked to pieces all around, Congal was seen to be in hand-to-hand combat with Nabgodon. With the fury of two rutting stags, they gored one another mercilessly, neither seeming to be able to get the upper hand. But then a Norse warrior called, “Nabgodon will have your head and your bride betrothed.”

When Congal heard this, he gave one mighty cry and, with a fearsome stroke of his sword, took Nabgodon’s head clean from his shoulders. Seeing their king beheaded, the Norsemen took to their ships and fled. The battle was over. Bloody victory was claimed by the men of Erin.

Congal was severely wounded, as were many of his warriors, but tended by Taisie and the wise women of Rathlin, most were recovered within six weeks.

“Go and seek a territory for you and your wife Congal,” said Donn, for although Congal was High King of Ireland, law and custom dictated that it was up to the King of Ulster to grant him, and his new Ulster bride, lands in the north.

And so, the territory on the mainland nearest Rathlin was granted to Congal and Taisie – a glen that ran northwards right to the coast with Taisie’s island home in view just across

the sea. A stronghold was built there, and, in time, the glen became known as Glentaisie, or glen of Taisie of the white or bright sides. Not that Queen Taisie herself had white sides or anything like it, but the fort that was built for her was said to be whitewashed with lime and shone like a beacon for miles around.

Whether or not Congal Cláiringnech and Queen Taisie lived happily ever after we can only but imagine. In folk memory, the name of Congal is all but forgotten, but the lovely Princess Taisie lives on in the name of the beautiful glen in which she once laughed and loved.

Molly McAnulty and the Water Horse

Best viewed from the town of Ballycastle, on the north coast of Antrim, is the familiar stark outline of Fairhead, or Benmore (An Aill Mhór; The Big Cliff) as it was once better known.

From the clifftop, the scene on a clear day, out over Murlough Bay, Rathlin Island and the wild Atlantic coastline of Scotland, is breath-taking. Once home to the last native golden eagles in Ireland, it is a special place by any standards. Foreboding, romantic and achingly beautiful, ravens and buzzards still effortlessly ride the updrafts. Peregrine falcons patrol the edges and tend their young in eyries perched on inaccessible rock ledges.

On the open heather-clad plateau are two beautiful little bodies of water; Loch-na-Crannagh (Lough of the Crannog) and Loch Dubh (Black Lough). In summertime, trout rise from their depths to snatch midges and other insects that rise and fall in such numbers as to make the water surface look continuously rain spattered. Swallows and martins drink and bathe on the wing. All around the loughs' rocky edges, wheatears and stonechats flit and feed. Lying under a blue sky listening to the skylarks overhead, is a pleasant way to spend an afternoon.

The presence of a crannog - a small island fortress - tells us that people have lived here for centuries out of mind. For many, many years local people, less interested in the

beauty that surrounded them than scraping a living from it, have clung to this windswept place. The imposing coastal precipices prevent easy access to the great riches to be had along the shoreline six hundred and sixty feet below.

But there is one narrow and dangerously steep gully which offers the intrepid and sure-footed traveller a way down to the sea. It is known as the Grey Man's Path. Topmost, it is way-marked by a fallen column of basalt. This became lodged in its present position many centuries ago and now acts as a great lintel over the entrance to the dizzying track below. The steep part of the path is treacherous at the best of times, but in wet or stormy weather, which is frequent, or in the dark, it is deadly dangerous. Nevertheless, people depending on the bounty of the sea below have always been willing to take the risk. Doubtless, some have fallen to their deaths over the years, and many are the tales of strange occurrences and unexplained sightings.

The Grey Man, after which the path is named, is undoubtedly the apparition most often associated with Fairhead. His appearance is considered a portent of doom and most famously, perhaps, a sighting of him by fishermen was recorded in the year 1796. They saw what looked like a swirling column of smoke or mist moving over the surface of the sea. As it came near the land, it grew into the form of a giant man dressed in a great grey cloak. Without stopping, he moved up through the cleft in the rock and, when he reached the top, he turned to face the sea and spread out his arms as if invoking something - a curse or a blessing - they knew not what.

That night there was an almighty storm. The sound

of billowing waves, and crashing thunder, and flashes of lightning came from the locality of the coal mine near Fairhead. The miners and their wives fell upon their knees in prayer, for they thought it must surely be the end of the world. The next day they saw that whole columns of basalt had been thrown down into the sea. Rocks no power on earth could have moved lay shattered in the boulder field below. The Grey Man, it seemed, had shown his displeasure.

But let us hear about Molly McAnulty who lived on the far side of Loch Dubh, on the top of Fair Head. She always used the Grey Man's Path to go down to Murlough Bay to gather dulse. One evening, just as it was coming on dark, she was returning home with a full creel and as usual she stopped along the way to catch her breath, for the path is very steep and her load was heavy.

As she took her rest, she noticed in the dim light the figure of man approaching along the path she had just come. He seemed to have a strange way of walking as if he was limping - herpling - as the local people would say. Suffice to say, his gait was odd and unfamiliar to her. Molly paid very little heed, but by the time she stopped again she noticed he was catching up with her and so she lifted her creel and moved on a bit further. Again, she had to stop and by this time the stranger was almost beside her.

Just to be civil, Molly spoke and commented on the lovely soft evening it was. The stranger returned her civility,

"Indeed it is Miss," he said, but his accent was not local, and his voice was a harsh whisper.

Molly assumed he was some sort of traveller and, again, she hoisted her load on her back and moved on. All the while

she could hear his footsteps behind her and the harsh rasping of his breathing. When she reached the top, Molly was out of breath herself and she sat down on a rock to rest once more. This time the stranger took the liberty of sitting down beside Molly, and she became very uncomfortable.

"I live just over there," said Molly, pointing to the cottage beyond Loch Dubh.

"I know," said the stranger in his harsh whisper. Molly was surprised by his answer for she did not recognise this man at all. In the last glimmer of daylight, she studied his face closely as he looked out to sea. She saw that it was grey, and expressionless, like a corpse. Below the hood of his cloak, she noticed too that the long strands of his hair hanging down were green. She could not help herself but ask, "Why is your hair such a strange hue?"

"It is from living beneath the waters of Loch Dubh all these hundreds of years," the man said with a great sigh.

Well Molly really began to fear for her safety. This man was mad, or drunk, or both she thought. Just then he let out another long weary sigh and laid his head down on Molly's lap and seemed to fall fast asleep. For a moment Molly was paralysed with terror. She looked about in desperation, but all she could see were the distant dim lights of the cottages that dotted Fairhead. Even if she screamed for help, by the time anyone would come this madman could have her strangled or thrown over the cliff.

It was only then Molly noticed something else very unusual about her mysterious stalker. From under his long dark cloak, she could see his feet were misshapen. They were like overgrown horses' hooves, and they were all split and

cracked. A cold shiver of terror went down her spine as the fear of God weighed down upon her.

"What will I do at all?" she whimpered to herself. Sick with fear and trembling, like a birch leaf in a breeze, she slowly eased herself out from under the stranger's head and, shrugging off her shawl, she gently rested his head on the pillow she made of it. Then she took off like a hare, her bare feet hardly touching the ground. All she could hear was the thumping of her own heart beating in her chest as she waited to be set upon from behind at every step.

When she got to within hailing distance of her home, she heard the heavy thud of hooves and the wild neighing of an enraged stallion galloping, galloping, galloping behind her. She screamed out, "Help!" but then her toe caught on a heather root, and she tripped and ploughed into the ground. She must have hit her head or passed out from sheer fright. Hearing all the commotion, her father ran from the cottage, but the night had fallen deathly quiet. He found his daughter lying almost lifeless and carried her indoors.

The next day Molly went back with her father to retrieve the creel of dulse, and there in the soft peaty ground they found the hoof prints left there by an Capall Uisce - the Water Horse long known to dwell in Loch Dubh. Molly's tattered shawl was found hanging from a low wind-bent thorn tree down by the shore, a quarter of a mile from where she left it.

Before that night, Molly had refused to believe the old fireside stories about An Capall Uisce - the strange dark creature that stalks the Grey Man's Path and Fairhead at twilight in the form of a man, hoping to lure some unsuspecting young woman down into the otherworld. After

that night, and to her dying day, Molly McAnulty could not be enticed to take the Grey Man's Path again.

"Not for all the tae in China would I take it," she used to say. To gather her dulse, she preferred to walk the ten miles there, and the ten miles back, from Murlough Bay.



The Battle of War Hollow

Over a thousand years ago, the Viking strangle hold on Erin was finally broken at the Battle of Clontarf. The great High King, and fearless warrior chieftain, Brian Boru was killed on that Good Friday, the 23rd of April in the year 1014. Some said that he fell in combat, but he was an old man by then. More likely is the story that he was murdered by a fleeing Viking mercenary as he knelt down to pray in his tent.

Whatever way it was, Erin was freed from the scourge of Viking rule, but over the following centuries there were still raids and incursions from the north. This is the story of one raid by the infamous Viking warlord, adventurer and king - Magnus Barefoot. He had been born and raised in the Hebrides and, because his favoured garb was a gathered woven cloth draped around his body like a skirt, leaving his legs uncovered, he was known as Barefoot.

From the Hebrides to the Isle of Man, Magnus Barefoot and his infamous sword, Legbiter, inspired fear. The Norse king left a trail of misery and destruction in his wake and no place was spared his cruelty and greed. He raided villages and desecrated monasteries, and even robbed the holy relics of St. Columba on Iona.

Violent and heartless as Magnus Barefoot was, he was also a wily old wolf, and his influence was not confined to the islands and coastal territories of the old kingdom of Dalriada. He made alliances as far as the southwest coast of Erin too.

Here he persuaded the King of Munster, Muirchertach Ua Briain - Murtagh O'Brien, to give his daughter's hand to his

own son Sigurd.

All winter long, Magnus Barefoot's party feasted at Kincor, County Limerick, in celebration of the marriage. It was very glad Murtagh O'Brien was to see the back of his boastful, over-bearing Viking guests.

On their long journey home Magnus Barefoot's fleet eventually anchored off the north coast of Erin. They came ashore at Dunluce, where they browbeat the local Chieftain O'Flynn into promising them three hundred head of cattle. Thus emboldened and tempted by further riches, they ventured into the lands of the O'Cahan's. It was harvest time and the rents had just been paid. The marauders pillaged the full of a bullock's hide of gold and treasure before starting back for their ships.

As his warriors plundered and terrorized the countryside, Magnus Barefoot remained aboard his ship. It was only on the third day that he deigned to come ashore and travel inland to meet his army. Clad in helmet and shining breast armour, he bore a red shield inlaid with a golden lion in one hand, and a long spear in the other. Hanging by his side, with its gold hand grip and ivory hilt, was Legbiter, his faithful and much feared sword. In his fortieth year, and wearing a bright red cloak emblazoned front and back with a lion of yellow silk, Magnus Barefoot was indeed an imposing warrior king and all who saw him trembled in awe.

That night, the beacon fires were set aflame. Warriors from all across Dalriada answered the call and by the next morning they were assembled at Dunluce. Hampered by the low-lying, treacherous ground of Ballywillan Bog, and encumbered by their weighty plunder and the many head of

slow-moving stolen cattle, the Vikings made painful progress towards the coast. Behind them were the O'Cahans, bent on revenge and taking back their cattle. Standing in their way were the massed warriors of Dalriada.

When the battle cry was raised, the Norsemen hastily buried their stolen gold and treasure in the bog, to retrieve it once their enemy had been defeated. They fought fiercely, but some of their number fled and left Magnus Barefoot to fight on with a small band of loyal warriors. Almost all were slaughtered. Barefoot himself was pierced through the thigh with a spear but, too proud and dauntless to call for mercy, he continued to fight. In his weakened state, he was engaged by a broadsword-wielding warrior who, with one mighty sweep of his blade, almost decapitated the Norse king. The carnage was over. Magnus Barefoot lay dead in a muddy pool of gore.

Very few Norsemen survived what became known as the Battle of War Hollow, among them, Barefoot's son Sigurd. He was given his father's sword, Legbiter, to take back home and by which to remember him, and his downfall. The Norsemen sailed away utterly vanquished, and the north coast of Erin enjoyed relative peace for the next hundred years.

Some say Magnus Barefoot is buried on Iona, where he once plundered St. Columba's monastery, and where many kings of Alba and Erin lie. A stone was said to be erected to his memory there, and inscribed with the words, 'Not for a long life, but for great deeds does a king live.'

The Battle of War Hollow was fought in the townland of Cloghorr - Cloch an Óir in the Irish - which means the Stone of Gold - and reminds us of the great riches that were buried there over nine hundred years ago. In all that time, no one has

found the exact place. If and when someone does, they will be very rich indeed. Somewhere in Ballywillan Bog there still lies the full of a bullock's hide of gold and treasure – waiting to be discovered.



Lady Goose Girl

It is almost three centuries ago when, one fine summer's day, Lady Cantyre visited Rathlin Island. The waters were calm and the wind perfect for a pleasure cruise across the Sea of Moyle, from Argyllshire. Of course, when she landed in Church Bay there was no carriage, or other fitting means of transportation, and so, in her bustling petticoats and skirts, she began walking.

Up and over the island she meandered, stopping to look at lambs, and kid goats and wildflowers. Eventually, she came upon a young girl, not more than thirteen years old, who was herding a flock of white geese along the road. It being a fine day, and the geese happily grazing as they went, the young girl was in no hurry.

Lady Cantyre stopped to speak to the young goose herder, but in all her short and sheltered life, the girl had never seen such a grand lady before, and she was very shy.

"Lá maith agat," she stumbled, in her native tongue.

"And good day to you too," said Lady Cantyre with a smile, "what is your name girl?"

"Catriona Black," she answered, and those two most unlikely of social acquaintances fell into conversation about the weather, and the geese, and the fields and flowers that bloomed all around them. Then Lady Cantyre said, "Your eyes are very beautiful and unusual my dear. You have the look of the Lamonts."

And there may very well have been some ancestral resemblance, for it was said that some of the Lamonts came over to Rathlin when the clan scattered in the face of

persecution by Robert the Bruce. In their bid to become less conspicuous, the clansmen took on common family names such as Black.

After passing the time of day with Catriona for only a few minutes by the side of the road, Lady Cantyre said on a whim,

“Would you like to become my maid?”

“I would have to ask my aunt,” said Catriona, not knowing the importance of Lady Cantyre’s question.

“Your aunt?”

“Yes. She looks after me. My mother is dead.”

“Well, you better take me to her then.”

Catriona did as Lady Cantyre wished and, shortly after, they were outside the cottage of her aunt and guardian.

“My lady we are very grateful for your kind offer,” said Catriona’s aunt, “I have children of my own to feed, and so I will let her go into your care. You will not rue this day my lady. Catriona is as clever and honest a girl as God ever put breath into.”

Well, that thirteen-year-old girl was dressed in her Sunday best and, with her little lip trembling through fear and her heart breaking to leave her loving home, she sailed across the sea to Argyllshire, and the biggest house she had ever seen.

Catriona grew up in that fine house and was loved by all. Lady Cantyre’s husband was often absent, it being the time of the Young Pretender of whom Lord Cantyre was a supporter, but Catriona was oblivious to Bonnie Prince Charlie and all that turmoil. She was happy and privileged to enjoy the good company of the young Sir Hugh and his sister Maeve. Many long walks and innocent adventures they had, and all of it was an education to Catriona. As they stretched towards adulthood they were not as equals, but neither was their

relationship just that of servant and masters.

Late one autumn, when the last leaves were falling red and brown, the three young folk were out gathering hazel nuts together in the wood, as they had done many times before, with such fun and laughter. Suddenly there was a loud cry of distress. Without hesitation the seventeen-year-old Sir Hugh ran toward the source of the commotion to render what assistance as he might be able. He was followed close behind by his sister and Catriona.

There they found a man lying unconscious and bleeding from an open wound to his scalp. He was obviously at death’s door and the young nobleman lifted the poor man’s head and tried to give him what comfort he could. As he did so, a party of soldiers suddenly appeared, as if from nowhere. They accused Sir Hugh of the cowardly crime, arrested him and brought him before the court. The young man strongly protested his innocence of course but being staunch opponents of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Lord Cantyre, they would hear none of it. Sir Hugh was committed for trial on the sworn evidence of the soldiers.

Shortly after these events, Maeve was sent to France to finish her education and there she unaccountably fell ill. The weeks dragged. Lady Cantyre was distraught with worry. Her husband and daughter were away, and her son was languishing in jail. Her only comfort was Catriona, the Rathlin maid, and heavily did the grieving Lady lean upon her.

Eventually the day of her son’s trial arrived, and Lady Cantyre was inconsolable.

“With no witness to come to his defence, they will find my son guilty and hang him for a crime he did not commit,” she wailed.

“I could prove his innocence if you wish my lady,” said Catriona calmly.

“You could my dear, but alas, no judge would accept the evidence of a lady’s maid.”

“But I need not go to the court as a maid, my lady. I can go as Maeve. Dress me in her fine clothes and take me to the court in your carriage. They will hear my evidence then,” said Catriona.

And that is what they did. Catriona, acting as Lady Maeve, took to the witness stand in defence of Sir Hugh. She risked perjury, and her own young neck, but Lady Cantyre need not have worried herself on that score. Catriona was the perfect witness. She was honest and sincere in her evidence, for of course she had been an eyewitness, but more than that, she was so ladylike in her demeanour that she convinced the judge of young Cantyre’s innocence. The case was dismissed. Sir Hugh was spared the hangman’s noose.

And that might have been the end of the story, except that the young man had always been fond of Catriona and now, grateful for his life, he felt a love for her he had never known before. Sir Hugh begged his mother for permission to take Catriona as his wife.

“I know she is not of noble birth mother, but I love her.”

“When I took Catriona as my maid, her aunt told me I would not rue the day,” said the old noble woman with a sigh. “She told me too that Catriona was as clever and honest a girl as God ever put breath into. She was right about these things. Catriona has proven her nobility without deeds of land, or title. You have my consent and my blessing son.” Sir Hugh was overjoyed, but there was one condition placed upon the marriage – Catriona was to be sent to France to ‘finish’ her

education along with Maeve.

Hugh and Catriona were eventually married, and for many years she was dearly loved by her husband, and by her servants and tenants. Long after she was widowed, she continued to look to the well-being of the poor people under her protection, but there was always a special place in her heart for the people of her island home.

And that is how a young orphan maid, Catriona Black from Rathlin, rose from herding geese along the road, to become Lady Cantyre, though, in private and with great affection, the family always called her Lady Goose Girl.

FIRE AND BRIMSTONE AT DUNSEVERICK

Of all the many castles and strongholds along the Antrim coast, Dunseverick – fort of Sobhairce, the 5th century chieftain whose name it still bears, has perhaps the longest and most colourful past. It is said that the stone walls and chambers have echoed to the names of Cú Chulainn and the 1st century Red Branch Knights. Fergus, the first king of Dal Riada and the Earls of Ulster - the O'Neills, the O'Cahans and McDonnells, have all resided here at one time or another. Even St. Patrick was once said to have sheltered among its cloisters.

From its mythological founding by the Milesians, who drove the Tuath Dé Danann underground thirty-five centuries ago, to its final destruction by Cromwellian troops in the 1650s, Dunseverick is steeped in legend, history and romance.

But let us go back to the 12th century, when the mighty O'Cahans were firmly installed at Dunseverick from where they kept lookout across the sea for Viking invaders. At this time, news reached Ireland from Flanders that an army was being raised to go and join in the crusades. Young Turlough O'Cahan asked and was given permission by his father to enlist. Along with other chieftains' sons and their warriors he went off to fight in the holy lands.

Before long, word came back that these young Irish soldiers were distinguishing themselves by their great valour in battle, their commitment to their faith and their

gift for poetry, stories and song. Their reputation as warriors and scholars was second to none, and none more so than Turlough O'Cahan. Victory soon followed and, after Geoffrey de Boullion was crowned King of Jerusalem and appointed Protector of the Holy Sepulchre, most of the Crusaders returned home.

In centuries long past, the people who lived on the northeast coast of Erin welcomed the bitter winds that swept the Sea of Moyle, and whipped it into a galloping herd of furious white-maned horses. Then, and only then, could they lie in their beds at night, content they were safe from the attention of Viking raiders. When the wind blew steadily from the north, and the sea was favourable for long distance voyaging, everyone dreaded what might appear over the northern horizon.

In Turlough's absence, a much weakened, and poorly defended Dunseverick, fell to the trickery of a marauding Norseman called Jarl Hakon – Earl Hakon – who had landed further along the coast, under the cover of darkness. On his orders, almost everyone in the castle, including the old O'Cahan chieftain, Turlough's father, was put to the sword. Only young Lady O'Cahan – Turlough's beloved sister - was spared. Earl Hakon had made up his mind to have her for his bride and lady.

"I would rather die than be wed to a pagan," she answered, and whether Earl Hakon admired her courage, or he so desired her to accept him willingly as her husband, he declared his love for her, and agreed to be baptized as a Christian. Two priests came from Camus, the monastery at Brugh na Bann, to preside over the joint ceremonies of Earl Hakon's baptism, which was soon to be followed by his marriage to Lady

O’Cahan. A great assembly of grimacing Norsemen watched their leader kneel before the priest, to confess his sins and bear witness to his conversion to Christianity.

As the priest leaned Earl Hakon back, to pour the holy water over his brow and so complete the sacrament, a tall powerful figure of a man pushed his way through to the front. He was clad in a ragged heavy cloak of the Irish fashion, held fast at his breast by a gold Tara brooch. He was unarmed, and the skin of his bare forearms and face was as brown as a nut. Under his long wild hair and beard, Lady O’Cahan saw that it was her brother, Turlough.

“I will baptise the heathen with Greek Fire!” he cried, and he rushed forward. Unstopping a little vial, he had hidden under his cloak, Turlough pitched the contents over his most despised enemy. There was a flash and a flare of bright light. A gasp of horror and fear followed. Earl Hakon cried out in agony, as he suddenly and inexplicably burst into flames. Not satisfied with his attack, by what everyone thought must be brimstone, in his wild fury the O’Cahan thrust his hands around the Norseman’s neck and began to throttle him. As they fought hand to hand, the fire caught their clothes and both men were consumed by the blaze. The terrible acrid stench of burning hair and flesh caught in the throats of everyone who was near and their stomachs churned and heaved.

No one dared to go near the two grappling warriors for fear they too would be engulfed, and the flames quickly spread to the heavy wall hangings and loose floor coverings. There were no witnesses to the final gruesome demise of Earl Hakon and Turlough, except perhaps the young and innocent Lady O’Cahan. As the flames leapt higher and higher, and the

castle became a crackling inferno, the young noble woman screamed and hurled herself from a window, into the restless sea a hundred feet below, and never spoke another word. Her desperate act was, perhaps, hastened by her anguish in the knowledge that all belonging to her and that she loved, were now dead. Or perhaps she was driven to self-destruction simply because she was aflame herself. We shall never know.

Very soon, the whole castle was ablaze and, as the roof timbers and thatch began to flare up, all the Norsemen fled for their lives. Waiting for them were the O’Cahan warriors, returned from the Crusades with their beloved captain, Turlough. Earl Hakon’s men were all of them hacked down by the score and thrown over the precipice into the sea. None survived, and the place is still known as Ben an Donir – the cliff of the Danes.

Dunseverick was reduced to a blackened shell. It was not the first time the castle had been laid to waste and some years later it was rebuilt, but for the very last time. Today, only a few remnants of the six feet thick entrance walls which Cromwell’s soldiers were unable to completely demolish still remain.

To this day, the people who live in Dunseverick village nearby often report that, even over the sound of a howling winter gale, they can still hear the terrible cries of Grainne Roe, the O’Cahan Banshee. Perhaps they can, but in the midst of a storm, when the wind is screeching in the heavens, and the waves are crashing up over the ruins of Dunseverick, it would be a brave woman, or fool-hardy man, who would go down to the little promontory and look over into the churning chasm to see for themselves.

If they did, they might just discover that fearful wailing

is the tortured soul of young Lady O’Cahan, eternally re-enacting her death-leap from the castle walls into the sea, accompanied by the ghostly cries of those Viking invaders tumbling over Ben an Donir – beseeching the Valkyries to guide their spirits safely to Valhalla.



The Man with the Sore Foot

To our minds, spring means light after the darkness of winter, birdsong, fresh green growth, new life. But to our ancestors living off the land, hand to mouth, Spring often meant something else entirely.

The first of May was Gale Day – the day when tenant farmers paid the first half of their annual rent to the landlords. Failure to do so could mean eviction. It was also the time when farmers took stock of their winter stores. Last season’s potatoes, clamped in the ground for six months were starting to go bad and it would be another few months before fresh spuds could be harvested. Indeed, all winter provisions for people and animals were now running low.

Spring was the hardest time of the year for many country folk. And so, when a man or a woman saved a few shillings at a time of plenty, if they were wise, they held on to it for dear life against that time of year they called the *old grey hag of spring*.

In those not-so-far-off days there was nothing to fall back on when illness or injury struck. If a man didn’t work, his family didn’t eat. It was as simple as that. And so folk tried to protect themselves against mishap and tragedy. They would carefully put by what few coppers they could against the trial they called *the man with the sore foot*.

Not surprising then that in those hard times the countryside was full of beggars, tramps and suilers. Call them what you will, they were men, and sometimes women and children, of the road who traipsed the highways and byways of Ireland asking for a crust here, and somewhere to lay their

heads there. Be sure they got many a short shrift, but likewise many a kindly farmer's wife gave what she could.

Anyway, there was once a young farmer and his newly wedded wife. She was a towns-woman born and bred and was just coming to terms with her new life and the strange doings and sayings of country folk.

One day the young farmer landed home with a skip to his step saying, "I did well at the fair today Martha."

And as he had seen his father do many times with his mother, he handed over the few shillings he had made from his dealings and said with a twinkle in his eye, "Put that by for the man with the sore foot."

Well, the young farmer's wife took the money and put it aside, "As you wish my dear," she said and set her man down to a feed of spuds and buttermilk.

All went well until a few days later a man of the roads came to the door.

"Would you have anything for me at all Missus?" the man said. Well Martha looked him up and down. She saw that his toes were sticking out from a pair of worn-out shoes where the uppers had long since parted with the soles.

"Are you the man with the sore foot?" she asked.

"Indeed Missus. It's just what I am," said he, "foresore and weary, for its many miles I've travelled this day." Well, of course, Martha gave the old tramp the few shillings her husband had told her to put by for the man with the sore foot.

When the young farmer came home, Martha set him down to his dinner, and very pleased she was with herself to tell him that she had carried out his wishes to the letter. His face went red and then white.

"You gave our savings away and for the asking?"

Well, that young couple had their first good row and she blamed him, and he blamed her and wasn't it always so. In the end Martha said, "Well, there's no cure for it now."

And neither there was. The young farmer promised to never say such a fool thing again and Martha promised to never do such a fool thing again.

Somehow or another they paid their rent on the 1st of May and got through the rest of the spring. Summer was good to them and, come autumn time, the crops had grown well. The harvest was brought in, and it was a topper. The rent was paid on the November Gale Day and, after the fair, the young farmer came home to Martha.

"Take this," he said, "keep it for when the old grey hag of spring appears."

"As you wish my dear," she said and set her man down to a great feed of spuds and buttermilk.

Time passed and all went well. One cold day in the month of April, an old woman of the roads came to the door.

"Would you have anything for me at all missus?" the woman begged.

Well Martha looked her up and down. Her face was etched with deep furrows and had a deathly pallor. There was not a single tooth in her head and her long matted hair was as grey as a goose.

"Are you the old grey hag of spring?" said Martha.

"Indeed Missus. It's just what I am," said she, "as grey and haggard an old woman as ever there was."

Well Martha gave the old woman the few shillings her husband had told her to put by for the coming of the old grey hag of spring.

When the young farmer came home, Martha set him

down to his dinner, and very pleased she was with herself to tell him that she had carried out his wishes to the letter. His face went red and then white.

"You gave our savings away and for the asking?"

Well, that young couple had their second good row and she blamed him, and he blamed her and wasn't it always so.

"We are destroyed entirely!" cried the young farmer. "We haven't a penny to pay the rent. Now we must take to the road like beggars ourselves. You may get what you need woman and pull the front door behind ye."

The young farmer tended to his last chores and Martha baked a loaf and caught up her fattest hen and took them with her. As they headed out the lane onto the road, Martha overtook her husband and dragging behind her on a piece of rope was their own front door.

"What in the name of all that is good are ye doing woman?" said he.

"I'm pulling the door behind me as you told me husband," said Martha.

"There must be a curse on me that I married a woman as fool you Martha dear," he cried, but on they went anyway; Martha with the loaf and the hen under her arm, and the door rattling along behind her, and her husband ranting and raving like a madman.

They travelled a long way till they came to a crossroads and there was a tiny old man sitting down smoking a clay pipe.

"Good evening," said the wee man, "you're a strange looking pair to be coming along the road. Him with a face like a summons and her trailing a door behind!"

"Don't talk to me," said the young farmer, "believe you

me, it's a very strange way we came to be on the road."

"You wouldn't have a bite o' meat you could spare?" asked the wee man.

"We're just about to stop here and break bread," said Martha, "and you're welcome to join us."

Well, Martha got a quare look from her husband, but she never mismade herself and they sat down to dine, with the door for a table. When they were finished, Martha gave the wee man the last heel of the loaf wrapped in a cloth and bid him welcome to it.

"You will be rewarded for your kindness Missus," he said and away he went.

All the next day they traipsed along dusty roads until eventually they came to another crossroads and there sat an old woman. Ancient she was and bent nearly double.

"Good evening," said the wee woman, "you're a strange looking pair to be coming along the road. Him with a face like a summons and her trailing a door behind!"

"Don't talk to me," said the young farmer, "it's a very strange way we came to be on the road."

"You wouldn't have a bite o' meat you could spare?" asked the wee woman.

"We're just about to stop here and cook this chicken," said Martha, "and you're welcome to join us." Well, Martha got another quare look from her husband, but she never mismade herself. She plucked and cooked the chicken over a fire, and they sat down to dine with the door for a table. When they were finished, Martha gave the wee woman the last drumstick wrapped in a cloth and bid her welcome to it.

"You will be rewarded for your kindness Missus," she said and away she went.

After a very long journey the next day, the young farmer and Martha came to the edge of a wood. In those days, the wolf was still heard in Ireland and bands of cut-throat robbers roamed the countryside. The young farmer found an oak tree with great spreading branches.

"We'll sleep under this tree tonight," he said, "and pray that the Good Lord provides for us tomorrow."

"I'm not sleeping here," said Martha, "we'll heave this door up into the branches and make a bed of it, and we'll be safe from the wild beasts of the forest." Too tired to argue, the young farmer did as his wife bid. Worn out by the day's travelling, up in that oak tree they slept.

In the middle of the night, they were rudely awakened by strange noises, and they lay quietly to hear if it was beast or Christian. It was no wild animal, but two thieves come to share out their ill-gotten gains.

"A sovereign for you and one for me. A sovereign for you and one for me."

Well, the young farmer and Martha began to shake with fear. And the more they shook the more afeared they became. Suddenly there was a loud CRACK, and the branch their bed was resting on broke. Down came front door, farmer, Martha and all right onto the heads of those two robbers. Thinking it was a trap or that the wrath of God had fallen upon them they ran for their lives leaving their plunder behind them.

When the young farmer counted out all the gold that had been left to them, he said, "Aw Martha dear, I must be blessed to have a wife as wise as you."

Two days and two nights it took them to get back home, and the young farmer dragged the front door all the way. It was hung back on its hinges and the rent was paid. I would

like to say that the young farmer and Martha lived happily ever after, but it would not be entirely the truth.

They had many more rows throughout their long, married lives, and wasn't it always so. But after every single argument, the farmer always promised to never say such fool things again and Martha always promised to never do such fool things again.

The Children of Lir

Twenty-five centuries ago, when the Tuath Dé Danann were waning in power, five of their chieftains challenged for the seat of High King. Bodhbh Dearg was chosen, but Lir believed he should have been the chosen one. In his displeasure, he exiled himself and withheld his allegiance to Bodhbh Dearg which caused great strife.

In the meantime, Lir's wife died and, seeing an opportunity to heal the wound, Bodhbh Dearg offered one of his daughters in marriage. Happily, Lir and Aoibh were wed, and they made a good match. Aoibh bore Lir four children – a daughter, Fionnuala and her twin brother Aodh and then twin boys, Fiachra and Conn. Lir adored his children. It was said that he used to watch over them at night as they slept, and he played with them endlessly.

But misfortune seemed never to be far away from the household of Lir, and his beloved second wife Aoibh died also. Distraught by grief as he was, Lir grieved more for his children, who would now have to face life without their mother's love. Fionnuala and Aodh were old enough to feel her loss, but Fiachra and Conn would not remember her at all.

Bodhbh Dearg loved his grandchildren very much, and it pained him greatly to see them motherless, so he offered his youngest daughter Aoifé to Lir, and the pair were married. It was to be an ill-fated match.

Aoifé did not bear her husband any children and neither could she take to her stepfamily, though she was their aunt. It was obvious to everyone that Lir did not love Aoifé as he

had the mother of his children, and so the future was sown for tragedy.

So sick in the heart with jealousy was Aoife she cried out, "Lir cares not whether I live or die. To his children he gives all his love."

She took to her bed for a year attended by wise women and druids. Eventually, Aoifé arose, and Lir could see a change had come over her. He hoped his young wife could now take her place as the children's stepmother. When Aoife offered to take them on a journey to see their grandfather Lir was well pleased. But Aoifé had made up her embittered mind to do away with the children.

Along the road they stopped by a lonely lough where Aoifé hoped to tempt her guards to slay them in return for gold, but they would have nothing to do with her wickedness. So Aoifé ordered the children to undress and bathe in the dark waters. Although she was only twelve years old, Fionnuala was mistrustful of her stepmother and was slow to act, but eventually she too obeyed and entered the lough. As she did so, Aoifé used a hazel wand to place an enchantment on her stepchildren. Naked and shivering, their goose-pimpled skin suddenly sprouted quills. The quills grew into feathers and the children of Lir cried out in terror as they slowly transformed into four pure white swans.

"Three hundred years will you spend on Lough Derryvarragh," said Aoifé, her voice raised and trembling for the terrible deed she had just done.

"Three hundred years on the stormy Sea of Moyle and three hundred more in Erris Bay on the wild western ocean. Only then may you hear the bell of a new religion and regain your human form."

“Cruel are you Aoifé who have worked this trickery on us,” said Fionnula. “Unmake your curse and maybe our father will spare you.” And Aoife’s heart did quiver with regret and fear, but she had not the power to undo the enchantment.

When Lir discovered his wife’s treachery, the pain was like a spear going through his breast. In his anguish, Bodhbh Dearg cursed his own daughter, “Forever are you condemned to be a demon of the air, to be blown here and there over the mountain tops by the icy winds.”

There and then Aoifé was turned into a hideous grey creature with wings like a bat, and she was swept up into the heavens screeching and wailing like a banshee.

Lir and Bodhbh Dearg went in search of the children. By Lough Derryvaragh, in the middle of Erin, they heard the most heart-rending and beautiful singing. It was the Children of Lir, for although they had been greatly altered in shape, they still they retained their voices. When they saw their father and grandfather, Fionnula, Aodh, Fiachra and Conn rushed forward in a great flurry of white wings and water, and Lir waded in waist-deep to greet them. Sad it was to see him embrace his children and shed his tears of agony. Lir knew that no power on earth could return them to their human form.

Often it was that Lir and Bodhbh Dearg went to Lough Derryvaragh to be with the children and to hear them sing.

Fionnula was like a mother to her three brothers, often singing them to sleep with an ancient lullaby and embracing them with her great white cape. It was always the same – Fiachra under her right wing, Conn under her left and Aodh nestled in at her breast.

And so, sunset by sunset did three hundred years

slowly pass. With the terrible sadness of a last farewell, the Children of Lir flew away to the north. What hardships they had endured on those calm enough waters of Lough Derryvaragh was nothing compared to the sufferings the Sea of Moyle would subject them to. Night after winter night, they were storm tossed and dashed against the jagged shore. Their great black feet were frozen to the rocks, and more than once they became separated in the midst of a howling gale, and had to breast out the tempest alone, heads and necks folded in under their wings. At these times, Fionnula would sing tirelessly so that her brothers might hear her and not despair. Her voice rose over the whirling winds. In the grey of dawn, her white feathers shone like a beacon. Somehow, in the vastness of that restless sea, the children would find each other and come together again.

Their only relief was a rare summer calm or a sheltered river mouth, of which there are many along the coast of Antrim. Then they could rest and preen their feathers. In this way, the Children of Lir prevailed for another three hundred torturous years.

At long last, they flew towards the setting sun and the island of Inish Glora on the edge of the western ocean. For three hundred more years, they survived there, and the fame and legend of the singing swans travelled far and wide. All the birds of the air flocked there, and that place became known as Loch na nÉan – the Lake of Birds.

Almost nine hundred years had passed. In that time Christianity came to Erin. A man reached Inish Glora and built a stone dwelling there. At first, the Children of Lir were wary of him, but the old hermit eventually gained their trust. One day he heard them singing and he hastened down to the

water's edge and called them, "Are ye the Children of Lir of which the legend speaks?"

"We are," said Fionnula, and she was saddened to hear that her father, and the Tuath Dé Danann, had not been seen abroad for many years.

"The old ways have been swept aside," said the hermit, "I am a holy man of the new religion."

When Fionnula heard the peal of a bell rung by him, she called her brothers to her side, "Our woes are coming to an end," she said.

The Children of Lir paddled ashore where they told the holy man their story. Around their necks he placed silver chains and, binding the siblings together that they might never be separated again, he vowed to protect them.

At this time, it so happened that a marriage was taking place between a Connacht chieftain and a princess from Munster. Hearing of the singing swans the princess asked for them as a wedding gift, but the holy man denied her whim.

"Then I will seize them," bellowed the chieftain.

At the point of a sword, he took hold of the chains and started to drag the swans out of the shallow water. As he did so, their shape began to alter. Their feathers fell away, and their bare skin hung in hideous wrinkles. Where once had been velvet down and hard beaks - red and black - now sprouted long wisps of white hair and toothless sagging jaws appeared.

"What evil magic is this?" cried the chieftain, and he ran from that place in great fear, for he had witnessed the Children of Lir change from beautiful white swans into ancient, withered creatures that fell dead at his feet.

The holy man dug a grave on Inish Glora and laid the

Children of Lir to rest. In memory of what Fionnula had told him, he placed her in the ground first with Fiachra at her right side, Conn at her left and Aodh nestled in at her breast.

If a stone was placed to mark their grave, the winds and weather of a thousand years have long since crumbled it away. But their story lives on - as moving and cherished a tale as was ever told.

And it is because of the story of The Children of Lir that swans are still protected as sacred birds in Ireland.

Mermaid Tales

For time out of memory, strange stories of creatures, half human and half sea creature, have been common among fishermen and mariners. Some tell of beautiful maidens come ashore to dance on lonely moonlit strands, before donning their seal skin and returning to the sea as selkies before dawn.

Others tell of mermaids sitting upon remote rocks with brightly coloured scaly tail fins, singing enchanting songs in strange tongues, or gazing into a looking glass and combing their long, beautiful hair. Often said to be harbingers of misfortune, many old tales warn of sailors, and even ships, being lured to their doom by these mysterious beings.

Selkies and mermaids are often said to be the reincarnations of drowned souls or, as Christians later maintained, angels fallen into the sea when Lucifer was expelled from heaven and sent down to hell. In any event, around the coast of Antrim mermaids seem to be more common than the selkies of western shores. Coastal dwellers have always claimed their existence, but few have ever seen them. Fewer still have told how they ensnared a mermaid or tempted one to a life on land. Take the story of a Rathlin Island Mermaid as a time-honoured example.

Very early one summer's morning a man was scouring the shore below the hill across from Church Bay. He heard someone singing beautifully, but he did not recognise the air, and nor did he the words, for they were of a strange language, neither Irish nor English.

Greatly intrigued, the Rathlin man moved slowly toward

the source of the music and there he spied a maiden, sitting on rocks by the edge of the sea in the dawn light. As far as he could see, she was naked and never in his whole life had he beheld such a stirring sight. Long did the Rathlin man listen to the delightful singing and, as she sang, he watched the young woman combing her long hair until he was mesmerised by her. But then he saw something that made his heart almost leap to his throat. It was a long shining tail that she raised from the water as she moved on the rock. There and then he knew she was not of his world, but a mermaid from the depths of the ocean.

This revelation was almost beyond belief, but it only made the man crave her the more. Being a bachelor, and living a lonely island existence, it did not take him long to fall in love with the mermaid and imagine their life together. But how would he capture her heart? At last, he plucked up the courage and revealed himself. The Mermaid was startled, but she sat her ground.

"I'm afraid I have been spying on you Miss," said the man, not knowing whether she could understand him or not, "and listening to your beautiful singing."

"Come closer to me," she said stretching out her hand, "all is well." And the man stumbled towards her as if in a trance.

"Will you marry me?" he faltered, "and live with me on land?"

"Alas!" she said, "I cannot in my mermaid form, but if you will take away my tail and keep it hidden, we can be man and wife."

So that is what the man did. With a knife he removed her tail to reveal her long pale-skinned legs. They were married soon afterwards and lived together in his cottage home on

Rathlin. In time, they had four children and, as far as anyone could tell, they lived very happily together.

But then one day, while the man was away at sea fishing, their oldest boy, who was by now twelve years old, found the mermaid's tail hidden in the rafters of the byre. Not knowing what it was, the boy took it in to his mother in the kitchen. Sad to say, that was the end of their blissful life together for, as everyone knows, a mermaid once reunited with her tail is compelled to return to the ocean.

When the woman saw her tail, the mermaid in her stirred. She bid a fond farewell to her children and took the tail down to the shore where she slipped into the sea, never to be seen again – not on land anyway.

It's a sad story and strange one, but perhaps the strangest mermaid story of them all, and possibly the oldest, concerns a creature called Lí Ban. She was said to be a woman who took refuge in a chamber, as the waters of an enchanted spring overflowed and gushed forth to form the mighty Lough Neagh. Her father, and all belonging to her, were swept away and drowned. She, along with her faithful dog, were the only survivors.

As Lí Ban peered out from her underwater sanctuary, she could see the salmon swimming by. For a year she prayed to the goddess Danu that she and her dog would be delivered from their sunken prison. Danu was good to her, for at last she turned her into a creature half woman and half fish, and her dog into an otter that he would be forever able to accompany her.

Lí Ban and her otter companion lived in the dark waters of that mysterious lough, but after centuries untold, she tired of its depths and venturing through rivers, underwater caverns

and channels she came to the Sea of Moyle. Three hundred years Lí Ban and her otter swam in the sea and sheltered in caves along the Antrim coast. Somewhere there the story might have ended slightly differently except by this time Christianity had come to Erin.

Comgall, later to become Saint Comgall, had established a monastery at Bangor in the County Down where, it was said, eight thousand monks dwelt. To feed them, Comgall sent out fishermen all along the coast. One day a monk called Beoan, who was sailing to Rome on a pilgrimage, heard strange singing from under the sea. A creature appeared that was neither woman nor fish but of course none other than Lí Ban.

Recalling the power of speech, Lí Ban was able to tell her story and Beoan promised to return twelve months hence when he would rescue her. This he did and casting his nets at the mouth of the Inver River near Latharna (Larne) he caught Lí Ban and took her back to his master at Bangor.

Of course, she caused great uproar and wonder among the monks, one of whom recorded the fact that Comgall converted her to Christianity. The moment she denounced her belief in the old gods, she was transformed back into a woman, whereupon she fell dead, and her soul straightaway ascended to heaven.

Lí Ban was canonised by Comgal as Saint Muirgen which simply means Of the Sea. Her feast day is the 27th of January, and she is counted among the holy women of Ireland. Miracles are said to have been wrought in her name and her story surely marks her as the most unusual of saints.

Fifteen hundred years after her death, the strange tale of Lí Ban seems to raise more questions than it answers – not least, what became of her pet otter? Well, some say he was

killed but others that he is still to be seen hunting the rock pools and kelp forest at low tide for a meal and, of course, taking shelter in the many sea caves along the Antrim coast.

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Guide to Pronunciations

The following is a very simplified guide to the English pronunciation of some of the Irish place and character names as they appear in each story. Allowing for the number of Irish vowel and consonant sounds which do not appear in English, regional pronunciation and accents, and my distinct lack of Irish, I have attempted to reproduce phonetically the sounds of each syllable which I hope non-Irish speakers will find helpful. I have also included approximate translations where appropriate.

Finvola of the Four Sows

de na gceithre cránacha - (of the four sows) - din-e care-a gron-agh-ha - 12

The Queen of Mountsandel

Brugh-na-Bann - (Banks of the Bann) - Brew-na-Ban - 17

Congal Cláiringnech - Con-gal Clor-ing-nagh - 17, 49, 50, 52

Craoibhe - Creeve - 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 49, 50

Dundabheann - Doon-ee-van - 17, 18, 19

Eas Craoibhe - (Waterfall of Creeve) - Ass Creeve - 17, 20, 21, 49

Emain Macha - Ow-in Mach-a - 17, 18, 43, 47, 48

Fergus mac Léti - Fergus Mac Lay-tee - 17, 18, 19

Lugaid Luaigne - Low-aid Loogna - 17

The Three Princesses of Knocklayde

Aillbhe - Al-va - 30, 31

Aoife - Eef-ah - 30, 31, 81, 82

Cahir Rígh an Uladh - (Fort of the king of Ulster) - Ka-her Ri-an-Ullah - 28

Cnoc an triúir - Knock an tru-ar - 31

Cnoc na Mairge - Knock na Margee - 31

Dalriada - Dal-ri-ada or Dal-raid-a - 59, 60, 61

Fionn mac Cumhaill - Fin-ma-Cool - 30, 32, 34

Gabha - Gow-ah - 30, 31

Ger - Ger (hard G) - 30, 31

Glas - Gloss - 30, 31

Muireoc - Mur-ock - 30, 31

Oisín - Ush-een - 30, 33, 34, 35, 36

The Last of the Fianna

Fionn mac Cumhaill - Fin-ma-Cool - 30, 32, 34

Oisín - Ush-een - 30, 33, 34, 35, 36

Tír Na-Og - Tear-na-nogue - 33, 34

Deirdre of the Sorrows

Ainlé - Awn-leh - 44, 45, 47

Ardán - Aw-ar-dawn - 44, 45, 47

Buachaille Etive Mòr - (Great Herdsman of Etive) - Boo-la Etive More - 46

Conchobar Mac Nessa - Kon-or Mac Ness-a - 43, 45, 46, 48

Cú Chulainn - (The Hound of Ulster) - Koo Hull-lin (Koo Kull-lin) - 44, 45, 68

Deirdre na mbrón - Deirdre of the Sorrows - Dear-dra Na Brone - 43

Ebhla - Eve-la - 44

Emain Macha - Ow-in Mach-a - 17, 18, 43, 47, 48

Fedlimid mac Daill - Fell-im-eed Mac Dal - 43

Fergus mac Róich - Fergus Mac or Ro-gh - 46, 47

Naoise - Neesh-eh - 44, 45, 46, 47

Uisneach - Oosh-na - 44, 46, 47, 48

Queen Taisie

Craoibhe - Creeve - 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 49, 50

Congal Cláiringnech - Con-gal Clor-ing-nagh - 17, 49, 50, 52

Taisie - Tays-ee - 3, 49, 50, 51, 52

Brugh-na-Bann - (Banks of the Bann) - Brew-na-Ban - 17

Molly Mcanulty and the Water Horse

An Aill Mhór - The Big Cliff - An-Al-More (Vore) - 53

an Capall Uisce - (the Water Horse) - an Capel Ish-ka - 57

Loch Dubh - (Black Lough) - Loch Doo (Dov) - 53, 55, 56, 57

Loch-na-Crannagh - (lough of the crannog) - Loch-na-cran-ah - 53

Lady Goose Girl

Lá maith agat - (good day) - Law ma ha-gat - 63

Fire and Brimstone at Dunseverick

Cú Chulainn - (The Hound of Ulster) - Koo Hull-lin (Koo Kull-lin) - 44, 45, 68

Dunseverick - (fort of Sobhairce) - So-ar-ka (meaning sober) - 68, 69, 71

Tuath Dé Danann - Too-ah Day Dan-nan - 68, 80, 84

The Fate of The Children of Lir

Aodh - Ay (as in day) - 80, 82, 85

Aoibh - Eve - 80

Aoifé - Eef-ah - 80, 81, 82

Bodhbh Dearg - Bov Jar-ag - 80, 82

Conn - Con - 80, 82, 85

Fiachra - Fee-agh-ra - 80, 82, 85

Fionnuala - Fin-uall-la - 80

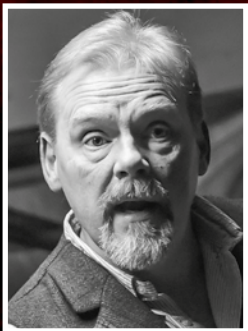
Lir - Commonly pronounced as Lir but historically Lear - 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85

Loch na nÉan - (Lake of Birds) - Loch na Nee-an - 83

Tuath Dé Danann - Too-ah Day Dan-nan - 68, 80, 84



Sam Henry, born in Coleraine in 1878, is best known as a folklorist and widely recognised for his 'Songs of the People' series that ran in the *Northern Constitution* between 1923 and 1939. He combined his work as an Excise and Pensions Officer, travelling the country, with a passion for collecting folk music and stories and, in doing so, has preserved local cultural traditions that otherwise may have been lost.



Colin Urwin is a modern-day Seanachaí. He is a folk singer, songwriter, storyteller, recording artist and now, author. As well as telling beautifully crafted traditional tales, he weaves original songs, stories and monologues into his live performances. He has worked with schools, adults and children with additional needs, people living with dementia and many other community groups. He has also appeared on stages all over the UK, Ireland and further afield.



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Coast & Glens
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