Irish Fairy Tales

（Volume I）

by James Stephens

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THE STORY OF TUAN MAC CAIRILL

CHAPTER I

Finnian, the Abbott of Moville, went southwards and eastwards in great haste. News had come to him in Donegal that there were yet people in his own province who believed in gods that he did not approve of, and the gods that we do not approve of are treated scurvily, even by saintly men.

He was told of a powerful gentleman who observed neither Saint’s day nor Sunday.

"A powerful person!" said Finnian.

"All that," was the reply.

"We shall try this person’s power," said Finnian.

"He is reputed to be a wise and hardy man," said his informant.

"We shall test his wisdom and his hardihood."

"He is," that gossip whispered "he is a magician."

"I will magician him," cried Finnian angrily. "Where

does that man live?"

He was informed, and he proceeded to that direction without delay.

In no great time he came to the stronghold of the gentleman who followed ancient ways, and he demanded admittance in order that he might preach and prove the new God, and exorcise and terrify and banish even the memory of the old one; for to a god grown old Time is as ruthless as to a beggarman grown old.

But the Ulster gentleman refused Finnian admittance. He barricaded his house, he shuttered his windows, and in a gloom of indignation and protest he continued the practices of ten thousand years, and would not hearken to Finnian calling at the window or to Time knocking at his door.

But of those adversaries it was the first he redoubted.

Finnian loomed on him as a portent and a terror; but he had no fear of Time. Indeed he was the foster brother of Time, and so disdainful of the bitter god that he did not even disdain him; he leaped over the scythe, he dodged under it,

and the sole occasions on which Time laughs is when he chances on Tuan, the son of Cairill, the son of Muredac Red neck.

CHAPTER II

Now Finnian could not abide that any person should resist both the Gospel and himself, and he proceeded to force the stronghold by peaceful but powerful methods. He fasted on the gentleman, and he did so to such purpose that he was admitted to the house; for to an hospitable heart the idea that a stranger may expire on your doorstep from sheer famine cannot be tolerated. The gentleman, however, did not give in without a struggle: he thought that when Finnian had grown sufficiently hungry he would lift the siege and take himself off to some place where he might get food. But he did not know Finnian. The great abbot sat down on a spot just beyond the door, and composed himself to all that might follow from his action. He bent his gaze on the

ground between his feet, and entered into a meditation from which he would Only be released by admission or death.

The first day passed quietly.

Often the gentleman would send a servitor to spy if that deserter of the gods was still before his door, and each time the servant replied that he was still there.

"He will be gone in the morning," said the hopeful master.

On the morrow the state of siege continued, and through that day the servants were sent many times to observe through spy holes.

"Go," he would say, "and find out if the worshipper of new gods has taken himself away."

But the servants returned each time with the same information.

"The new druid is still there," they said.

All through that day no one could leave the stronghold. And the enforced seclusion wrought on the minds of the servants, while the cessation of all work banded them

together in small groups that whispered and discussed and disputed. Then these groups would disperse to peep through the spy hole at the patient, immobile figure seated before the door, wrapped in a meditation that was timeless and unconcerned. They took fright at the spectacle, and once or twice a woman screamed hysterically, and was bundled away with a companion's hand clapped on her mouth, so that the ear of their master should not be affronted.

"He has his own troubles," they said. "It is a combat of the gods that is taking place."

So much for the women; but the men also were uneasy. They prowled up and down, tramping from the spy hole to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the turreted roof. And from the roof they would look down on the motionless figure below, and speculate on many things, including the staunchness of man, the qualities of their master, and even the possibility that the new gods might be as powerful as the old. From these peepings and discussions they would return languid and discouraged.

"If," said one irritable guard, "if we buzzed a spear at the persistent stranger, or if one slung at him with a jagged pebble!"

"What!" his master demanded wrathfully, "is a spear to be thrown at an unarmed stranger? And from this house!" And he soundly cuffed that indelicate servant.

"Be at peace all of you," he said, "for hunger has a whip, and he will drive the stranger away in the night."

The household retired to wretched beds; but for the master of the house there was no sleep. He marched his halls all night, going often to the spy hole to see if that shadow was still sitting in the shade, and pacing thence, tormented, preoccupied, refusing even the nose of his favourite dog as it pressed lovingly into his closed palm.

On the morrow he gave in.

The great door was swung wide, and two of his servants carried Finnian into the house, for the saint could no longer walk or stand upright by reason of the hunger and exposure to which he had submitted. But his frame was tough as the

unconquerable spirit that dwelt within it, and in no long time he was ready for whatever might come of dispute or anathema.

Being quite re established he undertook the conversion of the master of the house, and the siege he laid against that notable intelligence was long spoken of among those who are interested in such things.

He had beaten the disease of Mugain; he had beaten his own pupil the great Colm Cille; he beat Tuan also, and just as the latter's door had opened to the persistent stranger, so his heart opened, and Finnian marched there to do the will of God, and his own will.

CHAPTER III

One day they were talking together about the majesty of God and His love, for although Tuan had now received much instruction on this subject he yet needed more, and he laid as close a siege on Finnian as Finnian had before that laid on

him. But man works outwardly and inwardly. After rest he has energy, after energy he needs repose; so, when we have given instruction for a time, we need instruction, and must receive it or the spirit faints and wisdom herself grows bitter.

Therefore Finnian said: "Tell me now about yourself, dear heart."

But Tuan was avid of information about the True God. "No, no," he said, "the past has nothing more of interest for me, and I do not wish anything to come between my soul and its instruction; continue to teach me, dear friend and saintly father."

"I will do that," Finnian replied, "but I must first meditate deeply on you, and must know you well. Tell me your past, my beloved, for a man is his past, and is to be known by it."

But Tuan pleaded: "Let the past be content with itself, for man needs forgetfulness as well as memory."

"My son," said Finnian, "all that has ever been done has been done for the glory of God, and to confess our good and

evil deeds is part of instruction; for the soul must recall its acts and abide by them, or renounce them by confession and penitence. Tell me your genealogy first, and by what descent you occupy these lands and stronghold, and then I will examine your acts and your conscience."

Tuan replied obediently: "I am known as Tuan, son of Cairill, son of Muredac Red neck, and these are the hereditary lands of my father."

The saint nodded.

"I am not as well acquainted with Ulster genealogies as I should be, yet I know something of them. I am by blood a Leinsterman," he continued.

"Mine is a long pedigree," Tuan murmured.

Finnian received that information with respect and interest.

"I also," he said, "have an honourable record."

His host continued: "I am indeed Tuan, the son of Starn, the son of Sera, who was brother to Partholon."

"But," said Finnian in bewilderment, "there is an error

here, for you have recited two different genealogies."

"Different genealogies, indeed," replied Tuan thoughtfully, "but they are my genealogies."

"I do not understand this," Finnian declared roundly.

"I am now known as Tuan mac Cairill," the other replied, "but in the days of old I was known as Tuan mac Starn, mac Sera."

"The brother of Partholon," the saint gasped.

"That is my pedigree," Tuan said.

"But," Finnian objected in bewilderment, "Partholon came to Ireland not long after the Flood."

"I came with him," said Tuan mildly.

The saint pushed his chair back hastily, and sat staring at his host, and as he stared the blood grew chill in his veins, and his hair crept along his scalp and stood on end.

CHAPTER IV

But Finnian was not one who remained long in bewilderment. He thought on the might of God and he became that might, and was tranquil.

He was one who loved God and Ireland, and to the person who could instruct him in these great themes he gave all the interest of his mind and the sympathy of his heart.

"It is a wonder you tell me, my beloved," he said. "And now you must tell me more."

"What must I tell?" asked Tuan resignedly.

"Tell me of the beginning of time in Ireland, and of the bearing of Partholon, the son of Noah's son."

"I have almost forgotten him," said Tuan. "A greatly bearded, greatly shouldered man he was. A man of sweet deeds and sweet ways."

"Continue, my love," said Finnian.

"He came to Ireland in a ship. Twenty four men and twenty four women came with him. But before that time no

man had come to Ireland, and in the western parts of the world no human being lived or moved. As we drew on Ireland from the sea the country seemed like an unending forest. Far as the eye could reach, and in whatever direction, there were trees; and from these there came the unceasing singing of birds. Over all that land the sun shone warm and beautiful, so that to our sea weary eyes, our wind tormented ears, it seemed as if we were driving on Paradise.

"We landed and we heard the rumble of water going gloomily through the darkness of the forest. Following the water we came to a glade where the sun shone and where the earth was warmed, and there Partholon rested with his twenty four couples, and made a city and a livelihood.

"There were fish in the rivers of Eire', there were animals in her coverts. Wild and shy and monstrous creatures ranged in her plains and forests. Creatures that one could see through and walk through. Long we lived in ease, and we saw new animals grow, the bear, the wolf, the badger, the deer, and the boar.

"Partholon’s people increased until from twenty four couples there came five thousand people, who lived in amity and contentment although they had no wits."

"They had no wits!" Finnian commented.

"They had no need of wits," Tuan said.

"I have heard that the first born were mindless," said Finnian. "Continue your story, my beloved."

"Then, sudden as a rising wind, between one night and a morning, there came a sickness that bloated the stomach and purpled the skin, and on the seventh day all of the race of Partholon were dead, save one man only." "There always escapes one man," said Finnian thoughtfully.

"And I am that man," his companion affirmed.

Tuan shaded his brow with his hand, and he remembered backwards through incredible ages to the beginning of the world and the first days of Eire’. And Finnian, with his blood again running chill and his scalp crawling uneasily, stared backwards with him.

CHAPTER V

"Tell on, my love," Finnian murmured

"I was alone," said Tuan. "I was so alone that my own shadow frightened me. I was so alone that the sound of a bird in flight, or the creaking of a dew drenched bough, whipped me to cover as a rabbit is scared to his burrow.

"The creatures of the forest scented me and knew I was alone. They stole with silken pad behind my back and snarled when I faced them; the long, grey wolves with hanging tongues and staring eyes chased me to my cleft rock; there was no creature so weak but it might hunt me, there was no creature so timid but it might outface me. And so I lived for two tens of years and two years, until I knew all that a beast surmises and had forgotten all that a man had known.

"I could pad as gently as any; I could run as tirelessly. I could be invisible and patient as a wild cat crouching among leaves; I could smell danger in my sleep and leap at it with wakeful claws; I could bark and growl and clash with my

teeth and tear with them."

"Tell on, my beloved," said Finnian, "you shall rest in God, dear heart."

"At the end of that time," said Tuan, "Nemed the son of Agnoman came to Ireland with a fleet of thirty four barques, and in each barque there were thirty couples of people."

"I have heard it," said Finnian.

"My heart leaped for joy when I saw the great fleet rounding the land, and I followed them along scarped cliffs, leaping from rock to rock like a wild goat, while the ships tacked and swung seeking a harbour. There I stooped to drink at a pool, and I saw myself in the chill water.

"I saw that I was hairy and tufty and bristled as a savage boar; that I was lean as a stripped bush; that I was greyer than a badger; withered and wrinkled like an empty sack; naked as a fish; wretched as a starving crow in winter; and on my fingers and toes there were great curving claws, so that I looked like nothing that was known, like nothing that was animal or divine. And I sat by the pool weeping my

loneliness and wildness and my stern old age; and I could do no more than cry and lament between the earth and the sky, while the beasts that tracked me listened from behind the trees, or crouched among bushes to stare at me from their drowsy covert.

"A storm arose, and when I looked again from my tall cliff I saw that great fleet rolling as in a giant's hand. At times they were pitched against the sky and staggered aloft, spinning gustily there like wind blown leaves. Then they were hurled from these dizzy tops to the flat, moaning gulf, to the glassy, inky horror that swirled and whirled between ten waves. At times a wave leaped howling under a ship, and with a buffet dashed it into air, and chased it upwards with thunder stroke on stroke, and followed again, close as a chasing wolf, trying with hammering on hammering to beat in the wide wombed bottom and suck out the frightened lives through one black gape. A wave fell on a ship and sunk it down with a thrust, stern as though a whole sky had tumbled at it, and the barque did not cease to go down until it crashed

and sank in the sand at the bottom of the sea.

"The night came, and with it a thousand darknesses fell from the screeching sky. Not a round eyed creature of the night might pierce an inch of that multiplied gloom. Not a creature dared creep or stand. For a great wind strode the world lashing its league long whips in cracks of thunder, and singing to itself, now in a world wide yell, now in an ear dizzying hum and buzz; or with a long snarl and whine it hovered over the world searching for life to destroy.

"And at times, from the moaning and yelping blackness of the sea, there came a sound thin drawn as from millions of miles away, distinct as though uttered in the ear like a whisper of confidence and I knew that a drowning man was calling on his God as he thrashed and was battered into silence, and that a blue lipped woman was calling on her man as her hair whipped round her brows and she whirled about like a top.

"Around me the trees were dragged from earth with dying groans; they leaped into the air and flew like birds.

Great waves whizzed from the sea: spinning across the cliffs and hurtling to the earth in monstrous clots of foam; the very rocks came trundling and sidling and grinding among the trees; and in that rage, and in that horror of blackness I fell asleep, or I was beaten into slumber."

CHAPTER VI

"THERE I dreamed, and I saw myself changing into a stag in dream, and I felt in dream the beating of a new heart within me, and in dream I arched my neck and braced my powerful limbs.

"I awoke from the dream, and I was that which I had dreamed.

"I stood a while stamping upon a rock, with my bristling head swung high, breathing through wide nostrils all the savour of the world. For I had come marvellously from de

crepitude to strength. I had writhed from the bonds of age and was young again. I smelled the turf and knew for the

first time how sweet that smelled. And like lightning my moving nose sniffed all things to my heart and separated them into knowledge.

"Long I stood there, ringing my iron hoof on stone, and learning all things through my nose. Each breeze that came from the right hand or the left brought me a tale. A wind carried me the tang of wolf, and against that smell I stared and stamped. And on a wind there came the scent of my own kind, and at that I belled. Oh, loud and clear and sweet was the voice of the great stag. With what ease my lovely note went lilting. With what joy I heard the answering call. With what delight I bounded, bounded, bounded; light as a bird's plume, powerful as a storm, untiring as the sea.

"Here now was ease in ten yard springings, with a swinging head, with the rise and fall of a swallow, with the curve and flow and urge of an otter of the sea. What a tingle dwelt about my heart! What a thrill spun to the lofty points of my antlers! How the world was new! How the sun was new! How the wind caressed me!

"With unswerving forehead and steady eye I met all that came. The old, lone wolf leaped sideways, snarling, and slunk away. The lumbering bear swung his head of hesitations and thought again; he trotted his small red eye away with him to a near by brake. The stags of my race fled from my rocky forehead, or were pushed back and back until their legs broke under them and I trampled them to death. I was the beloved, the well known, the leader of the herds of Ireland.

"And at times I came back from my boundings about Eire', for the strings of my heart were drawn to Ulster; and, standing away, my wide nose took the air, while I knew with joy, with terror, that men were blown on the wind. A proud head hung to the turf then, and the tears of memory rolled from a large, bright eye.

"At times I drew near, delicately, standing among thick leaves or crouched in long grown grasses, and I stared and mourned as I looked on men. For Nemed and four couples had been saved from that fierce storm, and I saw them

increase and multiply until four thousand couples lived and laughed and were riotous in the sun, for the people of Nemed had small minds but great activity. They were savage fighters and hunters.

"But one time I came, drawn by that intolerable anguish of memory, and all of these people were gone: the place that knew them was silent: in the land where they had moved there was nothing of them but their bones that glinted in the sun.

"Old age came on me there. Among these bones weariness crept into my limbs. My head grew heavy, my eyes dim, my knees jerked and trembled, and there the wolves dared chase me.

"I went again to the cave that had been my home when I was an old man.

"One day I stole from the cave to snatch a mouthful of grass, for I was closely besieged by wolves. They made their rush, and I barely escaped from them. They sat beyond the cave staring at me.

"I knew their tongue. I knew all that they said to each other, and all that they said to me. But there was yet a thud left in my forehead, a deadly trample in my hoof. They did not dare come into the cave.

"'To morrow,' they said, 'we will tear out your throat, and gnaw on your living haunch'."

CHAPTER VII

"Then my soul rose to the height of Doom, and I intended all that might happen to me, and agreed to it.

"'To morrow,' I said, 'I will go out among ye, and I will die,' and at that the wolves howled joyfully, hungrily, impatiently.

"I slept, and I saw myself changing into a boar in dream, and I felt in dream the beating of a new heart within me, and in dream I stretched my powerful neck and braced my eager limbs. I awoke from my dream, and I was that which I had dreamed.

"The night wore away, the darkness lifted, the day came; and from without the cave the wolves called to me: "'Come out, O Skinny Stag. Come out and die.'

"And I, with joyful heart, thrust a black bristle through the hole of the cave, and when they saw that wriggling snout, those curving tusks, that red fierce eye, the wolves fled yelping, tumbling over each other, frantic with terror; and I behind them, a wild cat for leaping, a giant for strength, a devil for ferocity; a madness and gladness of lusty, unsparing life; a killer, a champion, a boar who could not be defied.

"I took the lordship of the boars of Ireland.

"Wherever I looked among my tribes I saw love and obedience: whenever I appeared among the strangers they fled away. And the wolves feared me then, and the great, grim bear went bounding on heavy paws. I charged him at the head of my troop and rolled him over and over; but it is not easy to kill the bear, so deeply is his life packed under that stinking pelt. He picked himself up and ran, and was knocked down, and ran again blindly, butting into trees and

stones. Not a claw did the big bear flash, not a tooth did he show, as he ran whimpering like a baby, or as he stood with my nose rammed against his mouth, snarling up into his nostrils.

"I challenged all that moved. All creatures but one. For men had again come to Ireland. Semion, the son of Stariath, with his people, from whom the men of Domnann and the Fir Bolg and the Galiuin are descended. These I did not chase, and when they chased me I fled.

"Often I would go, drawn by my memoried heart, to look at them as they moved among their fields; and I spoke to my mind in bitterness: "When the people of Partholon were gathered in counsel my voice was heard; it was sweet to all who heard it, and the words I spoke were wise. The eyes of women brightened and softened when they looked at me. They loved to hear him when he sang who now wanders in the forest with a tusky herd."

CHAPTER VIII

"OLD age again overtook me. Weariness stole into my limbs, and anguish dozed into my mind. I went to my Ulster cave and dreamed my dream, and I changed into a hawk.

"I left the ground. The sweet air was my kingdom, and my bright eye stared on a hundred miles. I soared, I swooped; I hung, motionless as a living stone, over the abyss; I lived in joy and slept in peace, and had my fill of the sweetness of life.

"During that time Beothach, the son of Iarbonel the Prophet, came to Ireland with his people, and there was a great battle between his men and the children of Semion. Long I hung over that combat, seeing every spear that hurtled, every stone that whizzed from a sling, every sword that flashed up and down, and the endless glittering of the shields. And at the end I saw that the victory was with Iarbonel. And from his people the Tuatha De' and the Ande' came, although their origin is forgotten, and learned people, because of their

excellent wisdom and intelligence, say that they came from heaven.

"These are the people of Faery. All these are the gods.

"For long, long years I was a hawk. I knew every hill and stream; every field and glen of Ireland. I knew the shape of cliffs and coasts, and how all places looked under the sun or moon. And I was still a hawk when the sons of Mil drove the Tuatha De' Danann under the ground, and held Ireland against arms or wizardry; and this was the coming of men and the beginning of genealogies.

"Then I grew old, and in my Ulster cave close to the sea I dreamed my dream, and in it I became a salmon. The green tides of ocean rose over me and my dream, so that I drowned in the sea and did not die, for I awoke in deep waters, and I was that which I dreamed. "I had been a man, a stag, a boar, a bird, and now I was a fish. In all my changes I had joy and fulness of life. But in the water joy lay deeper, life pulsed deeper. For on land or air there is always something excessive and hindering; as arms that swing at the sides of a

man, and which the mind must remember. The stag has legs to be tucked away for sleep, and untucked for movement; and the bird has wings that must be folded and pecked and cared for. But the fish has but one piece from his nose to his tail. He is complete, single and unencumbered. He turns in one turn, and goes up and down and round in one sole movement.

"How I flew through the soft element: how I joyed in the country where there is no harshness: in the element which upholds and gives way; which caresses and lets go, and will not let you fall. For man may stumble in a furrow; the stag tumble from a cliff; the hawk, wing weary and beaten, with darkness around him and the storm behind, may dash his brains against a tree. But the home of the salmon is his delight, and the sea guards all her creatures."

CHAPTER IX

"I became the king of the salmon, and, with my multitudes, I ranged on the tides of the world. Green and purple distances were under me: green and gold the sunlit regions above. In these latitudes I moved through a world of amber, myself amber and gold; in those others, in a sparkle of lucent blue, I curved, lit like a living jewel: and in these again, through dusks of ebony all mazed with silver, I shot and shone, the wonder of the sea.

"I saw the monsters of the uttermost ocean go heaving by; and the long lithe brutes that are toothed to their tails: and below, where gloom dipped down on gloom, vast, livid tangles that coiled and uncoiled, and lapsed down steeps and hells of the sea where even the salmon could not go.

"I knew the sea. I knew the secret caves where ocean roars to ocean; the floods that are icy cold, from which the nose of a salmon leaps back as at a sting; and the warm streams in which we rocked and dozed and were carried

forward without motion. I swam on the outermost rim of the great world, where nothing was but the sea and the sky and the salmon; where even the wind was silent, and the water was clear as clean grey rock.

"And then, far away in the sea, I remembered Ulster, and there came on me an instant, uncontrollable anguish to be there. I turned, and through days and nights I swam tirelessly, jubilantly; with terror wakening in me, too, and a whisper through my being that I must reach Ireland or die.

"I fought my way to Ulster from the sea.

"Ah, how that end of the journey was hard! A sickness was racking in every one of my bones, a languor and weariness creeping through my every fibre and muscle. The waves held me back and held me back; the soft waters seemed to have grown hard; and it was as though I were urging through a rock as I strained towards Ulster from the sea.

"So tired I was! I could have loosened my frame and been swept away; I could have slept and been drifted and

wafted away; swinging on grey green billows that had turned from the land and were heaving and mounting and surging to the far blue water.

"Only the unconquerable heart of the salmon could brave that end of toil. The sound of the rivers of Ireland racing down to the sea came to me in the last numb effort: the love of Ireland bore me up: the gods of the rivers trod to me in the white curled breakers, so that I left the sea at long, long last; and I lay in sweet water in the curve of a crannied rock, exhausted, three parts dead, triumphant."

CHAPTER X

"Delight and strength came to me again, and now I explored all the inland ways, the great lakes of Ireland, and her swift brown rivers.

"What a joy to lie under an inch of water basking in the sun, or beneath a shady ledge to watch the small creatures that speed like lightning on the rippling top. I saw the dragon

flies flash and dart and turn, with a poise, with a speed that no other winged thing knows: I saw the hawk hover and stare and swoop: he fell like a falling stone, but he could not catch the king of the salmon: I saw the cold eyed cat stretching along a bough level with the water, eager to hook and lift the creatures of the river. And I saw men.

"They saw me also. They came to know me and look for me. They lay in wait at the waterfalls up which I leaped like a silver flash. They held out nets for me; they hid traps under leaves; they made cords of the colour of water, of the colour of weeds but this salmon had a nose that knew how a weed felt and how a string they drifted meat on a sightless string, but I knew of the hook; they thrust spears at me, and threw lances which they drew back again with a cord. "Many a wound I got from men, many a sorrowful scar.

"Every beast pursued me in the waters and along the banks; the barking, black skinned otter came after me in lust and gust and swirl; the wild cat fished for me; the hawk and the steep winged, spear beaked birds dived down on me, and

men crept on me with nets the width of a river, so that I got no rest. My life became a ceaseless scurry and wound and escape, a burden and anguish of watchfulness and then I was caught."

CHAPTER XI

"THE fisherman of Cairill, the King of Ulster, took me in his net. Ah, that was a happy man when he saw me! He shouted for joy when he saw the great salmon in his net.

"I was still in the water as he hauled delicately. I was still in the water as he pulled me to the bank. My nose touched air and spun from it as from fire, and I dived with all my might against the bottom of the net, holding yet to the water, loving it, mad with terror that I must quit that loveliness. But the net held and I came up.

"'Be quiet, King of the River,' said the fisherman, 'give in to Doom,' said he.

"I was in air, and it was as though I were in fire. The

air pressed on me like a fiery mountain. It beat on my scales and scorched them. It rushed down my throat and scalded me. It weighed on me and squeezed me, so that my eyes felt as though they must burst from my head, my head as though it would leap from my body, and my body as though it would swell and expand and fly in a thousand pieces.

"The light blinded me, the heat tormented me, the dry air made me shrivel and gasp; and, as he lay on the grass, the great salmon whirled his desperate nose once more to the river, and leaped, leaped, leaped, even under the mountain of air. He could leap upwards, but not forwards, and yet he leaped, for in each rise he could see the twinkling waves, the rippling and curling waters.

"'Be at ease, O King,' said the fisherman. 'Be at rest, my beloved. Let go the stream. Let the oozy marge be forgotten, and the sandy bed where the shades dance all in green and gloom, and the brown flood sings along.'

"And as he carried me to the palace he sang a song of the river, and a song of Doom, and a song in praise of the

King of the Waters.

"When the king's wife saw me she desired me. I was put over a fire and roasted, and she ate me. And when time passed she gave birth to me, and I was her son and the son of Cairill the king. I remember warmth and darkness and movement and unseen sounds. All that happened I remember, from the time I was on the gridiron until the time I was born. I forget nothing of these things."

"And now," said Finnian, "you will be born again, for I shall baptize you into the family of the Living God." So far the story of Tuan, the son of Cairill.

No man knows if he died in those distant ages when Finnian was Abbot of Moville, or if he still keeps his fort in Ulster, watching all things, and remembering them for the glory of God and the honour of Ireland.

THE BOYHOOD OF FIONN

He was a king, a seer and a poet. He was a lord with a manifold and great train. He was our magician, our knowledgable one, our soothsayer. All that he did was sweet with him. And, however ye deem my testimony of Fionn excessive, and, although ye hold my praising overstrained, nevertheless, and by the King that is above me, he was three times better than all I say. Saint PATRICK.

CHAPTER I

Fionn got his first training among women. There is no wonder in that, for it is the pup's mother teaches it to fight, and women know that fighting is a necessary art although men pretend there are others that are better. These were the women druids, Bovmall and Lia Luachra. It will be wondered why his own mother did not train him in the first natural savageries of existence, but she could not do it. She could not keep him with her for dread of the clann Morna. The sons of

Morna had been fighting and intriguing for a long time to oust her husband, Uail, from the captaincy of the Fianna of Ireland, and they had ousted him at last by killing him. It was the only way they could get rid of such a man; but it was not an easy way, for what Fionn's father did not know in arms could not be taught to him even by Morna. Still, the hound that can wait will catch a hare at last, and even Manana'nn sleeps. Fionn's mother was beautiful, long haired Muirne: so she is always referred to. She was the daughter of Teigue, the son of Nuada from Faery, and her mother was Ethlinn. That is, her brother was Lugh of the Long Hand himself, and with a god, and such a god, for brother we may marvel that she could have been in dread of Morna or his sons, or of any one. But women have strange loves, strange fears, and these are so bound up with one another that the thing which is presented to us is not often the thing that is to be seen.

However it may be, when Uall died Muirne got married again to the King of Kerry. She gave the child to Bovmall and Lia Luachra to rear, and we may be sure that she gave

injunctions with him, and many of them. The youngster was brought to the woods of Slieve Bloom and was nursed there in secret.

It is likely the women were fond of him, for other than Fionn there was no life about them. He would be their life; and their eyes may have seemed as twin benedictions resting on the small fair head. He was fair haired, and it was for his fairness that he was afterwards called Fionn; but at this period he was known as Deimne. They saw the food they put into his little frame reproduce itself length ways and sideways in tough inches, and in springs and energies that crawled at first, and then toddled, and then ran. He had birds for playmates, but all the creatures that live in a wood must have been his comrades. There would have been for little Fionn long hours of lonely sunshine, when the world seemed just sunshine and a sky. There would have been hours as long, when existence passed like a shade among shadows, in the multitudinous tappings of rain that dripped from leaf to leaf in the wood, and slipped so to the ground. He would

have known little snaky paths, narrow enough to be filled by his own small feet, or a goat's; and he would have wondered where they went, and have marvelled again to find that, wherever they went, they came at last, through loops and twists of the branchy wood, to his own door. He may have thought of his own door as the beginning and end of the world, whence all things went, and whither all things came.

Perhaps he did not see the lark for a long time, but he would have heard him, far out of sight in the endless sky, thrilling and thrilling until the world seemed to have no other sound but that clear sweetness; and what a world it was to make that sound! Whistles and chirps, coos and caws and croaks, would have grown familiar to him. And he could at last have told which brother of the great brotherhood was making the noise he heard at any moment. The wind too: he would have listened to its thousand voices as it moved in all seasons and in all moods. Perhaps a horse would stray into the thick screen about his home, and would look as solemnly on Fionn as Fionn did on it. Or, coming suddenly on him, the

horse might stare, all a cock with eyes and ears and nose, one long drawn facial extension, ere he turned and bounded away with manes all over him and hoofs all under him and tails all round him. A solemn nosed, stern eyed cow would amble and stamp in his wood to find a flyless shadow; or a strayed sheep would poke its gentle muzzle through leaves.

"A boy," he might think, as be stared on a staring horse, "a boy cannot wag his tail to keep the flies off," and that lack may have saddened him. He may have thought that a cow can snort and be dignified at the one moment, and that timidity is comely in a sheep. He would have scolded the jackdaw, and tried to out whistle the throstle, and wondered why his pipe got tired when the blackbird's didn't . There would be flies to be watched, slender atoms in yellow gauze that flew, and filmy specks that flittered, and sturdy, thick ribbed brutes that pounced like cats and bit like dogs and flew like lightning. He may have mourned for the spider in bad luck who caught that fly. There would be much to see and remember and compare, and there would be, always, his two guardians. The

flies change from second to second; one cannot tell if this bird is a visitor or an inhabitant, and a sheep is just sister to a sheep; but the women were as rooted as the house itself.

CHAPTER II

Were his nurses comely or harsh looking? Fionn would not know. This was the one who picked him up when he fell, and that was the one who patted the bruise. This one said: "Mind you do not tumble in the well!"

And that one: "Mind the little knees among the nettles."

But he did tumble and record that the only notable thing about a well is that it is wet. And as for nettles, if they hit him he hit back. He slashed into them with a stick and brought them low. There was nothing in wells or nettles, only women dreaded them. One patronised women and instructed them and comforted them, for they were afraid about one.

They thought that one should not climb a tree!

"Next week,' they said at last, "you may climb this one,"

and "next week" lived at the end of the world!

But the tree that was climbed was not worth while when it had been climbed twice. There was a bigger one near by. There were trees that no one could climb, with vast shadow on one side and vaster sunshine on the other. It took a long time to walk round them, and you could not see their tops.

It was pleasant to stand on a branch that swayed and sprung, and it was good to stare at an impenetrable roof of leaves and then climb into it. How wonderful the loneliness was up there! When he looked down there was an undulating floor of leaves, green and green and greener to a very blackness of greeniness; and when he looked up there were leaves again, green and less green and not green at all, up to a very snow and blindness of greeniness; and above and below and around there was sway and motion, the whisper of leaf on leaf, and the eternal silence to which one listened and at which one tried to look.

When he was six years of age his mother, beautiful, long haired Muirne, came to see him. She came secretly, for she

feared the sons of Morna, and she had paced through lonely places in many counties before she reached the hut in the wood, and the cot where he lay with his fists shut and sleep gripped in them.

He awakened to be sure. He would have one ear that would catch an unusual voice, one eye that would open, however sleepy the other one was. She took him in her arms and kissed him, and she sang a sleepy song until the small boy slept again.

We may be sure that the eye that could stay open stayed open that night as long as it could, and that the one ear listened to the sleepy song until the song got too low to be heard, until it was too tender to be felt vibrating along those soft arms, until Fionn was asleep again, with a new picture in his little head and a new notion to ponder on.

The mother of himself! His own mother!

But when he awakened she was gone.

She was going back secretly, in dread of the sons of Morna, slipping through gloomy woods, keeping away from

habitations, getting by desolate and lonely ways to her lord in Kerry.

Perhaps it was he that was afraid of the sons of Morna, and perhaps she loved him.

CHAPTER III

THE women druids, his guardians, belonged to his father's people. Bovmall was Uail's sister, and, consequently, Fionn's aunt. Only such a blood tie could have bound them to the clann Baiscne, for it is not easy, having moved in the world of court and camp, to go hide with a baby in a wood; and to live, as they must have lived, in terror.

What stories they would have told the child of the sons of Morna. Of Morna himself, the huge shouldered, stern eyed, violent Connachtman; and of his sons young Goll Mor mac Morna in particular, as huge shouldered as his father, as fierce in the onset, but merry eyed when the other was grim, and bubbling with a laughter that made men forgive even his

butcheries. Of Cona'n Mael mac Morna his brother, gruff as a badger, bearded like a boar, bald as a crow, and with a tongue that could manage an insult where another man would not find even a stammer. His boast was that when he saw an open door he went into it, and when he saw a closed door he went into it. When he saw a peaceful man he insulted him, and when he met a man who was not peaceful he insulted him. There was Garra Duv mac Morna, and savage Art Og, who cared as little for their own skins as they did for the next man's, and Garra must have been rough indeed to have earned in that clan the name of the Rough mac Morna. There were others: wild Connachtmen all, as untameable, as unaccountable as their own wonderful countryside.

Fionn would have heard much of them, and it is likely that be practised on a nettle at taking the head off Goll, and that he hunted a sheep from cover in the implacable manner he intended later on for Cona'n the Swearer.

But it is of Uail mac Baiscne he would have heard most. With what a dilation of spirit the ladies would have told tales

of him, Fionn's father. How their voices would have become a chant as feat was added to feat, glory piled on glory. The most famous of men and the most beautiful; the hardest fighter; the easiest giver; the kingly champion; the chief of the Fianna na h Eirinn. Tales of how he had been way laid and got free; of how he had been generous and got free; of how he had been angry and went marching with the speed of an eagle and the direct onfall of a storm; while in front and at the sides, angled from the prow of his terrific advance, were fleeing multitudes who did not dare to wait and scarce had time to run. And of how at last, when the time came to quell him, nothing less than the whole might of Ireland was sufficient for that great downfall.

We may be sure that on these adventures Fionn was with his father, going step for step with the long striding hero, and heartening him mightily.

CHAPTER IV

He was given good training by the women in running and leaping and swimming.

One of them would take a thorn switch in her hand, and Fionn would take a thorn switch in his hand, and each would try to strike the other running round a tree.

You had to go fast to keep away from the switch behind, and a small boy feels a switch. Fionn would run his best to get away from that prickly stinger, but how he would run when it was his turn to deal the strokes!

With reason too, for his nurses had suddenly grown implacable. They pursued him with a savagery which he could not distinguish from hatred, and they swished him well whenever they got the chance.

Fionn learned to run. After a while he could buzz around a tree like a maddened fly, and oh, the joy, when he felt himself drawing from the switch and gaining from behind on its bearer! How he strained and panted to catch on that

pursuing person and pursue her and get his own switch into action.

He learned to jump by chasing hares in a bumpy field. Up went the hare and up went Fionn, and away with the two of them, hopping and popping across the field. If the hare turned while Fionn was after her it was switch for Fionn; so that in a while it did not matter to Fionn which way the hare jumped for he could jump that way too. Long ways, sideways or baw ways, Fionn hopped where the hare hopped, and at last he was the owner of a hop that any hare would give an ear for.

He was taught to swim, and it may be that his heart sank when he fronted the lesson. The water was cold. It was deep. One could see the bottom, leagues below, millions of miles below. A small boy might shiver as he stared into that wink and blink and twink of brown pebbles and murder. And these implacable women threw him in!

Perhaps he would not go in at first. He may have smiled at them, and coaxed, and hung back. It was a leg and an arm

gripped then; a swing for Fionn, and out and away with him; plop and flop for him; down into chill deep death for him, and up with a splutter; with a sob; with a grasp at everything that caught nothing; with a wild flurry; with a raging despair; with a bubble and snort as he was hauled again down, and down, and down, and found as suddenly that he had been hauled out.

Fionn learned to swim until he could pop into the water like an otter and slide through it like an eel.

He used to try to chase a fish the way he chased hares in the bumpy field but there are terrible spurts in a fish. It may be that a fish cannot hop, but he gets there in a flash, and he isn't there in another. Up or down, sideways or endways, it is all one to a fish. He goes and is gone. He twists this way and disappears the other way. He is over you when he ought to be under you, and he is biting your toe when you thought you were biting his tail.

You cannot catch a fish by swimming, but you can try, and Fionn tried. He got a grudging commendation from the

terrible women when he was able to slip noiselessly in the tide, swim under water to where a wild duck was floating and grip it by the leg.

"Qu ," said the duck, and he disappeared before he had time to get the " ack" out of him.

So the time went, and Fionn grew long and straight and tough like a sapling; limber as a willow, and with the flirt and spring of a young bird. One of the ladies may have said, "He is shaping very well, my dear," and the other replied, as is the morose privilege of an aunt, "He will never be as good as his father," but their hearts must have overflowed in the night, in the silence, in the darkness, when they thought of the living swiftness they had fashioned, and that dear fair head.

CHAPTER V

ONE day his guardians were agitated: they held confabulations at which Fionn was not permitted to assist. A man who passed by in the morning had spoken to them. They fed the man, and during his feeding Fionn had been shooed from the door as if he were a chicken. When the stranger took his road the women went with him a short distance. As they passed the man lifted a hand and bent a knee to Fionn.

"My soul to you, young master," he said, and as he said it, Fionn knew that he could have the man’s soul, or his boots, or his feet, or anything that belonged to him.

When the women returned they were mysterious and whispery. They chased Fionn into the house, and when they got him in they chased him out again. They chased each other around the house for another whisper. They calculated things by the shape of clouds, by lengths of shadows, by the flight of birds, by two flies racing on a flat stone, by throwing bones over their left shoulders, and by every kind of trick and

game and chance that you could put a mind to.

They told Fionn he must sleep in a tree that night, and they put him under bonds not to sing or whistle or cough or sneeze until the morning.

Fionn did sneeze. He never sneezed so much in his life. He sat up in his tree and nearly sneezed himself out of it. Flies got up his nose, two at a time, one up each nose, and his head nearly fell off the way he sneezed.

"You are doing that on purpose," said a savage whisper from the foot of the tree.

But Fionn was not doing it on purpose. He tucked himself into a fork the way he had been taught, and he passed the crawliest, tickliest night he had ever known. After a while he did not want to sneeze, he wanted to scream: and in particular he wanted to come down from the tree. But he did not scream, nor did he leave the tree. His word was passed, and he stayed in his tree as silent as a mouse and as watchful, until he fell out of it.

In the morning a band of travelling poets were passing,

and the women handed Fionn over to them. This time they could not prevent him overhearing.

"The sons of Morna!" they said.

And Fionn's heart might have swelled with rage, but that it was already swollen with adventure. And also the expected was happening. Behind every hour of their day and every moment of their lives lay the sons of Morna. Fionn had run after them as deer: he jumped after them as hares: he dived after them as fish. They lived in the house with him: they sat at the table and ate his meat. One dreamed of them, and they were expected in the morning as the sun is. They knew only too well that the son of Uail was living, and they knew that their own sons would know no ease while that son lived; for they believed in those days that like breeds like, and that the son of Uail would be Uail with additions.

His guardians knew that their hiding place must at last be discovered, and that, when it was found, the sons of Morna would come. They had no doubt of that, and every action of their lives was based on that certainty. For no secret

can remain secret. Some broken soldier tramping home to his people will find it out; a herd seeking his strayed cattle or a band of travelling musicians will get the wind of it. How many people will move through even the remotest wood in a year! The crows will tell a secret if no one else does; and under a bush, behind a clump of bracken, what eyes may there not be! But if your secret is legged like a young goat! If it is tongued like a wolf! One can hide a baby, but you cannot hide a boy. He will rove unless you tie him to a post, and he will whistle then.

The sons of Morna came, but there were only two grim women living in a lonely hut to greet them. We may be sure they were well greeted. One can imagine Goll's merry stare taking in all that could be seen; Cona'n's grim eye raking the women's faces while his tongue raked them again; the Rough mac Morna shouldering here and there in the house and about it, with maybe a hatchet in his hand, and Art Og coursing further afield and vowing that if the cub was there he would find him.

CHAPTER VI

But Fionn was gone. He was away, bound with his band of poets for the Galtees.

It is likely they were junior poets come to the end of a year's training, and returning to their own province to see again the people at home, and to be wondered at and exclaimed at as they exhibited bits of the knowledge which they had brought from the great schools. They would know tags of rhyme and tricks about learning which Fionn would hear of; and now and again, as they rested in a glade or by the brink of a river, they might try their lessons over. They might even refer to the ogham wands on which the first words of their tasks and the opening lines of poems were cut; and it is likely that, being new to these things, they would talk of them to a youngster, and, thinking that his wits could be no better than their own, they might have explained to him how ogham was written. But it is far more likely that his women guardians had already started him at those lessons.

Still this band of young bards would have been of infinite interest to Fionn, not on account of what they had learned, but because of what they knew. All the things that he should have known as by nature: the look, the movement, the feeling of crowds; the shouldering and intercourse of man with man; the clustering of houses and how people bore themselves in and about them; the movement of armed men, and the homecoming look of wounds; tales of births, and marriages and deaths; the chase with its multitudes of men and dogs; all the noise, the dust, the excitement of mere living. These, to Fionn, new come from leaves and shadows and the dipple and dapple of a wood, would have seemed wonderful; and the tales they would have told of their masters, their looks, fads, severities, sillinesses, would have been wonderful also.

That band should have chattered like a rookery.

They must have been young, for one time a Leinsterman came on them, a great robber named Fiacuil mac Cona, and he killed the poets. He chopped them up and chopped them

down. He did not leave one poeteen of them all. He put them out of the world and out of life, so that they stopped being, and no one could tell where they went or what had really happened to them; and it is a wonder indeed that one can do that to anything let alone a band. If they were not youngsters, the bold Fiacuil could not have managed them all. Or, perhaps, he too had a band, although the record does not say so; but kill them he did, and they died that way.

Fionn saw that deed, and his blood may have been cold enough as he watched the great robber coursing the poets as a wild dog rages in a flock. And when his turn came, when they were all dead, and the grim, red handed man trod at him, Fionn may have shivered, but he would have shown his teeth and laid roundly on the monster with his hands. Perhaps he did that, and perhaps for that he was spared.

"Who are you?" roared the staring black mouth with the red tongue squirming in it like a frisky fish.

"The son of Uail, son of Baiscne," quoth hardy Fionn. And at that the robber ceased to be a robber, the murderer

disappeared, the black rimmed chasm packed with red fish and precipices changed to something else, and the round eyes that had been popping out of their sockets and trying to bite, changed also. There remained a laughing and crying and loving servant who wanted to tie himself into knots if that would please the son of his great captain. Fionn went home on the robber's shoulder, and the robber gave great snorts and made great jumps and behaved like a first rate horse. For this same Fiacuil was the husband of Bovmall, Fionn's aunt. He had taken to the wilds when clann Baiscne was broken, and he was at war with a world that had dared to kill his Chief.

CHAPTER VII

A new life for Fionn in the robber's den that was hidden in a vast cold marsh.

A tricky place that would be, with sudden exits and even suddener entrances, and with damp, winding, spidery places to hoard treasure in, or to hide oneself in.

If the robber was a solitary he would, for lack of someone else, have talked greatly to Fionn. He would have shown his weapons and demonstrated how he used them, and with what slash he chipped his victim, and with what slice he chopped him. He would have told why a slash was enough for this man and why that man should be sliced. All men are masters when one is young, and Fionn would have found knowledge here also. lie would have seen Fiacuil's great spear that had thirty rivets of Arabian gold in its socket, and that had to be kept wrapped up and tied down so that it would not kill people out of mere spitefulness. It had come from Faery, out of the Shi' of Aillen mac Midna, and it would be brought back again later on between the same man's shoulder blades.

What tales that man could tell a boy, and what questions a boy could ask him. He would have known a thousand tricks, and because our instinct is to teach, and because no man can keep a trick from a boy, he would show them to Fionn.

There was the marsh too; a whole new life to be learned;

a complicated, mysterious, dank, slippery, reedy, treacherous life, but with its own beauty and an allurement that could grow on one, so that you could forget the solid world and love only that which quaked and gurgled.

In this place you may swim. By this sign and this you will know if it is safe to do so, said Fiacuil mac Cona; but in this place, with this sign on it and that, you must not venture a toe.

But where Fionn would venture his toes his ears would follow.

There are coiling weeds down there, the robber counselled him; there are thin, tough, snaky binders that will trip you and grip you, that will pull you and will not let you go again until you are drowned; until you are swaying and swinging away below, with outstretched arms, with outstretched legs, with a face all stares and smiles and jockeyings, gripped in those leathery arms, until there is no more to be gripped of you even by them.

"Watch these and this and that," Fionn would have been

told, "and always swim with a knife in your teeth."

He lived there until his guardians found out where he was and came after him. Fiacuil gave him up to them, and he was brought home again to the woods of Slieve Bloom, but he had gathered great knowledge and new supplenesses.

The sons of Morna left him alone for a long time. Having made their essay they grew careless.

"Let him be," they said. "He will come to us when the time comes."

But it is likely too that they had had their own means of getting information about him. How he shaped? what muscles he had? and did he spring clean from the mark or had he to get off with a push? Fionn stayed with his guardians and hunted for them. He could run a deer down and haul it home by the reluctant skull. "Come on, Goll," he would say to his stag, or, lifting it over a tussock with a tough grip on the snout, "Are you coming, bald Cona'n, or shall I kick you in the neck?"

The time must have been nigh when he would think of

taking the world itself by the nose, to haul it over tussocks and drag it into his pen; for he was of the breed in whom mastery is born, and who are good masters.

But reports of his prowess were getting abroad. Clann Morna began to stretch itself uneasily, and, one day, his guardians sent him on his travels.

"It is best for you to leave us now," they said to the tall stripling, "for the sons of Morna are watching again to kill you."

The woods at that may have seemed haunted. A stone might sling at one from a tree top; but from which tree of a thousand trees did it come? An arrow buzzing by one's ear would slide into the ground and quiver there silently, menacingly, hinting of the brothers it had left in the quiver behind; to the right? to the left? how many brothers? in how many quivers . . .? Fionn was a woodsman, but he had only two eyes to look with, one set of feet to carry him in one sole direction. But when he was looking to the front what, or how many whats, could be staring at him from the back? He might

face in this direction, away from, or towards a smile on a hidden face and a finger on a string. A lance might slide at him from this bush or from the one yonder.. In the night he might have fought them; his ears against theirs; his noiseless feet against their lurking ones; his knowledge of the wood against their legion: but during the day he had no chance.

Fionn went to seek his fortune, to match himself against all that might happen, and to carve a name for himself that will live while Time has an ear and knows an Irishman.

CHAPTER VIII

Fionn went away, and now he was alone. But he was as fitted for loneliness as the crane is that haunts the solitudes and bleak wastes of the sea; for the man with a thought has a comrade, and Fionn's mind worked as featly as his body did. To be alone was no trouble to him who, however surrounded, was to be lonely his life long; for this will be said of Fionn

when all is said, that all that came to him went from him, and that happiness was never his companion for more than a moment.

But he was not now looking for loneliness. He was seeking the instruction of a crowd, and therefore when he met a crowd he went into it. His eyes were skilled to observe in the moving dusk and dapple of green woods. They were trained to pick out of shadows birds that were themselves dun coloured shades, and to see among trees the animals that are coloured like the bark of trees. The hare crouching in the fronds was visible to him, and the fish that swayed in visibly in the sway and flicker of a green bank. He would see all that was to be seen, and he would see all that is passed by the eye that is half blind from use and wont.

At Moy Life' he came on lads swimming in a pool; and, as he looked on them sporting in the flush tide, he thought that the tricks they performed were not hard for him, and that he could have shown them new ones.

Boys must know what another boy can do, and they will

match themselves against everything. They did their best under these observing eyes, and it was not long until he was invited to compete with them and show his mettle. Such an invitation is a challenge; it is almost, among boys, a declaration of war. But Fionn was so far beyond them in swimming that even the word master did not apply to that superiority.

While he was swimming one remarked: "He is fair and well shaped," and thereafter he was called "Fionn" or the Fair One. His name came from boys, and will, perhaps, be preserved by them.

He stayed with these lads for some time, and it may be that they idolised him at first, for it is the way with boys to be astounded and enraptured by feats; but in the end, and that was inevitable, they grew jealous of the stranger. Those who had been the champions before he came would marshal each other, and, by social pressure, would muster all the others against him; so that in the end not a friendly eye was turned on Fionn in that assembly. For not only did he beat them at

swimming, he beat their best at running and jumping, and when the sport degenerated into violence, as it was bound to, the roughness of Fionn would be ten times as rough as the roughness of the roughest rough they could put forward. Bravery is pride when one is young, and Fionn was proud.

There must have been anger in his mind as he went away leaving that lake behind him, and those snarling and scowling boys, but there would have been disappointment also, for his desire at this time should have been towards friendliness.

He went thence to Lock Le'in and took service with the King of Finntraigh. That kingdom may have been thus called from Fionn himself and would have been known by another name when he arrived there.

He hunted for the King of Finntraigh, and it soon grew evident that there was no hunter in his service to equal Fionn. More, there was no hunter of them all who even distantly approached him in excellence. The others ran after deer, using the speed of their legs, the noses of their dogs and a

thousand well worn tricks to bring them within reach, and, often enough, the animal escaped them. But the deer that Fionn got the track of did not get away, and it seemed even that the animals sought him so many did he catch.

The king marvelled at the stories that were told of this new hunter, but as kings are greater than other people so they are more curious; and, being on the plane of excellence, they must see all that is excellently told of.

The king wished to see him, and Fionn must have wondered what the king thought as that gracious lord looked on him. Whatever was thought, what the king said was as direct in utterance as it was in observation.

"If Uail the son of Baiscne has a son," said the king, "you would surely be that son."

We are not told if the King of Finntraigh said anything more, but we know that Fionn left his service soon afterwards.

He went southwards and was next in the employment of the King of Kerry, the same lord who had married his own

mother. In that service he came to such consideration that we hear of him as playing a match of chess with the king, and by this game we know that he was still a boy in his mind however mightily his limbs were spreading. Able as he was in sports and huntings, he was yet too young to be politic, but he remained impolitic to the end of his days, for whatever he was able to do he would do, no matter who was offended thereat; and whatever he was not able to do he would do also. That was Fionn.

Once, as they rested on a chase, a debate arose among the Fianna Finn as to what was the finest music in the world.

"Tell us that," said Fionn turning to Oisi'n

"The cuckoo calling from the tree that is highest in the hedge," cried his merry son.

"A good sound," said Fionn. "And you, Oscar," he asked, "what is to your mind the finest of music?"

"The top of music is the ring of a spear on a shield," cried the stout lad.

"It is a good sound," said Fionn. And the other

champions told their delight; the belling of a stag across water, the baying of a tuneful pack heard in the distance, the song of a lark, the laugh of a gleeful girl, or the whisper of a moved one.

"They are good sounds all," said Fionn.

"Tell us, chief," one ventured, "what you think?"

"The music of what happens," said great Fionn, "that is the finest music in the world."

He loved "what happened," and would not evade it by the swerve of a hair; so on this occasion what was occurring he would have occur, although a king was his rival and his master. It may be that his mother was watching the match and that he could not but exhibit his skill before her. He committed the enormity of winning seven games in succession from the king himself! ! !

It is seldom indeed that a subject can beat a king at chess, and this monarch was properly amazed.

"Who are you at all?" he cried, starting back from the chessboard and staring on Fionn.

"I am the son of a countryman of the Luigne of Tara," said Fionn.

He may have blushed as he said it, for the king, possibly for the first time, was really looking at him, and was looking back through twenty years of time as he did so. The observation of a king is faultless it is proved a thousand times over in the tales, and this king's equipment was as royal as the next.

"You are no such son," said the indignant monarch, "but you are the son that Muirne my wife bore to Uall mac Balscne."

And at that Fionn had no more to say; but his eyes may have flown to his mother and stayed there.

"You cannot remain here," his step father continued. "I do not want you killed under my protection," he explained, or complained.

Perhaps it was on Fionn's account he dreaded the sons of Morna, but no one knows what Fionn thought of him for he never thereafter spoke of his step father. As for Muirne she

must have loved her lord; or she may have been terrified in truth of the sons of Morna and for Fionn; but it is so also, that if a woman loves her second husband she can dislike all that reminds her of the first one. Fionn went on his travels again.

CHAPTER IX

All desires save one are fleeting, but that one lasts for ever. Fionn, with all desires, had the lasting one, for he would go anywhere and forsake anything for wisdom; and it was in search of this that he went to the place where Finegas lived on a bank of the Boyne Water. But for dread of the clann Morna he did not go as Fionn. He called himself Deimne on that journey.

We get wise by asking questions, and even if these are not answered we get wise, for a well packed question carries its answer on its back as a snail carries its shell. Fionn asked every question he could think of, and his master, who was a poet, and so an honourable man, answered them all,

not to the limit of his patience, for it was limitless, but to the limit of his ability.

"Why do you live on the bank of a river?" was one of these questions. "Because a poem is a revelation, and it is by the brink of running water that poetry is revealed to the mind."

"How long have you been here?" was the next query. "Seven years," the poet answered.

"It is a long time," said wondering Fionn.

"I would wait twice as long for a poem," said the inveterate bard.

"Have you caught good poems?" Fionn asked him.

"The poems I am fit for," said the mild master. "No person can get more than that, for a man’s readiness is his limit."

"Would you have got as good poems by the Shannon or the Suir or by sweet Ana Life?"

"They are good rivers," was the answer. "They all belong to good gods."

"But why did you choose this river out of all the rivers?"

Finegas beamed on his pupil.

"I would tell you anything," said he, "and I will tell you that."

Fionn sat at the kindly man's feet, his hands absent among tall grasses, and listening with all his ears. "A prophecy was made to me," Finegas began. "A man of knowledge foretold that I should catch the Salmon of Knowledge in the Boyne Water."

"And then?" said Fionn eagerly.

"Then I would have All Knowledge."

"And after that?" the boy insisted.

"What should there be after that?" the poet retorted.

"I mean, what would you do with All Knowledge?"

"A weighty question," said Finegas smilingly. "I could answer it if I had All Knowledge, but not until then. What would you do, my dear?"

"I would make a poem," Fionn cried.

"I think too," said the poet, "that that is what would be done."

In return for instruction Fionn had taken over the service of his master's hut, and as he went about the household duties, drawing the water, lighting the fire, and carrying rushes for the floor and the beds, he thought over all the poet had taught him, and his mind dwelt on the rules of metre, the cunningness of words, and the need for a clean, brave mind. But in his thousand thoughts he yet remembered the Salmon of Knowledge as eagerly as his master did. He already venerated Finegas for his great learning, his poetic skill, for an hundred reasons; but, looking on him as the ordained eater of the Salmon of Knowledge, he venerated him to the edge of measure. Indeed, he loved as well as venerated this master because of his unfailing kindness, his patience, his readiness to teach, and his skill in teaching.

"I have learned much from you, dear master," said Fionn gratefully.

"All that I have is yours if you can take it," the poet

answered, "for you are entitled to all that you can take, but to no more than that. Take, so, with both hands."

"You may catch the salmon while I am with you," the hopeful boy mused. "Would not that be a great happening!" and he stared in ecstasy across the grass at those visions which a boy's mind knows.

"Let us pray for that," said Finegas fervently.

"Here is a question," Fionn continued. "How does this salmon get wisdom into his flesh?"

"There is a hazel bush overhanging a secret pool in a secret place. The Nuts of Knowledge drop from the Sacred Bush into the pool, and as they float, a salmon takes them in his mouth and eats them."

"It would be almost as easy," the boy submitted, "if one were to set on the track of the Sacred Hazel and eat the nuts straight from the bush."

"That would not be very easy," said the poet, "and yet it is not as easy as that, for the bush can only be found by its own knowledge, and that knowledge can only be got by

eating the nuts, and the nuts can only be got by eating the salmon."

"We must wait for the salmon," said Fionn in a rage of resignation.

CHAPTER X

Life continued for him in a round of timeless time, wherein days and nights were uneventful and were yet filled with interest. As the day packed its load of strength into his frame, so it added its store of knowledge to his mind, and each night sealed the twain, for it is in the night that we make secure what we have gathered in the day.

If he had told of these days he would have told of a succession of meals and sleeps, and of an endless conversation, from which his mind would now and again slip away to a solitude of its own, where, in large hazy atmospheres, it swung and drifted and reposed. Then he would be back again, and it was a pleasure for him to catch

up on the thought that was forward and re create for it all the matter he had missed. But he could not often make these sleepy sallies; his master was too experienced a teacher to allow any such bright faced, eager eyed abstractions, and as the druid women had switched his legs around a tree, so Finegas chased his mind, demanding sense in his questions and understanding in his replies.

To ask questions can become the laziest and wobbliest occupation of a mind, but when you must yourself answer the problem that you have posed, you will meditate your question with care and frame it with precision. Fionn's mind learned to jump in a bumpier field than that in which he had chased rabbits. And when he had asked his question, and given his own answer to it, Finegas would take the matter up and make clear to him where the query was badly formed or at what point the answer had begun to go astray, so that Fionn came to understand by what successions a good question grows at last to a good answer.

One day, not long after the conversation told of, Finegas

came to the place where Fionn was. The poet had a shallow osier basket on his arm, and on his face there was a look that was at once triumphant and gloomy. He was excited certainly, but be was sad also, and as he stood gazing on Fionn his eyes were so kind that the boy was touched, and they were yet so melancholy that it almost made Fionn weep. "What is it, my master?" said the alarmed boy.

The poet placed his osier basket on the grass.

"Look in the basket, dear son," he said. Fionn looked. "There is a salmon in the basket."

"It is The Salmon," said Finegas with a great sigh. Fionn leaped for delight.

"l am glad for you, master," he cried. "Indeed I am glad for you."

"And I am glad, my dear soul," the master rejoined.

But, having said it, he bent his brow to his hand and for a long time he was silent and gathered into himself.

"What should be done now?" Fionn demanded, as he stared on the beautiful fish.

Finegas rose from where he sat by the osier basket.

"I will be back in a short time," he said heavily. "While I am away you may roast the salmon, so that it will be ready against my return."

"I will roast it indeed," said Fionn.

The poet gazed long and earnestly on him.

"You will not eat any of my salmon while I am away?" he asked.

"I will not eat the littlest piece," said Fionn.

"I am sure you will not," the other murmured, as he turned and walked slowly across the grass and behind the sheltering bushes on the ridge.

Fionn cooked the salmon. It was beautiful and tempting and savoury as it smoked on a wooden platter among cool green leaves; and it looked all these to Finegas when he came from behind the fringing bushes and sat in the grass outside his door. He gazed on the fish with more than his eyes. He looked on it with his heart, with his soul in his eyes, and when he turned to look on Fionn the boy did not know

whether the love that was in his eyes was for the fish or for himself. Yet he did know that a great moment had arrived for the poet.

"So," said Finegas, "you did not eat it on me after all?" "Did I not promise?" Fionn replied.

"And yet," his master continued, "I went away so that you might eat the fish if you felt you had to."

"Why should I want another man's fish?" said proud Fionn.

"Because young people have strong desires. I thought you might have tasted it, and then you would have eaten it on me."

"I did taste it by chance," Fionn laughed, "for while the fish was roasting a great blister rose on its skin. I did not like the look of that blister, and I pressed it down with my thumb. That burned my thumb, so I popped it in my mouth to heal the smart. If your salmon tastes as nice as my thumb did," he laughed, "it will taste very nice."

"What did you say your name was, dear heart?" the poet

asked.

"I said my name was Deimne."

"Your name is not Deimne," said the mild man, "your name is Fionn."

"That is true," the boy answered, "but I do not know how you know it."

"Even if I have not eaten the Salmon of Knowledge I have some small science of my own."

"It is very clever to know things as you know them," Fionn replied wonderingly. "What more do you know of me, dear master?"

"I know that I did not tell you the truth," said the heavy hearted man.

"What did you tell me instead of it?"

"I told you a lie."

"It is not a good thing to do," Fionn admitted. "What sort of a lie was the lie, master?" "I told you that the Salmon of Knowledge was to be caught by me, according to the prophecy."

"Yes."

"That was true indeed, and I have caught the fish. But I did not tell you that the salmon was not to be eaten by me, although that also was in the prophecy, and that omission was the lie."

"It is not a great lie," said Fionn soothingly.

"It must not become a greater one," the poet replied sternly.

"Who was the fish given to?" his companion wondered.

"It was given to you," Finegas answered. "It was given to Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Baiscne, and it will be given to him."

"You shall have a half of the fish," cried Fionn.

"I will not eat a piece of its skin that is as small as the point of its smallest bone," said the resolute and trembling bard. "Let you now eat up the fish, and I shall watch you and give praise to the gods of the Underworld and of the Elements."

Fionn then ate the Salmon of Knowledge, and when it

had disappeared a great jollity and tranquillity and exuberance returned to the poet.

"Ah," said he, "I had a great combat with that fish."

"Did it fight for its life?" Fionn inquired.

"It did, but that was not the fight I meant."

"You shall eat a Salmon of Knowledge too," Fionn assured him.

"You have eaten one," cried the blithe poet, "and if you make such a promise it will be because you know."

"I promise it and know it," said Fionn, "you shall eat a Salmon of Knowledge yet."

CHAPTER XI

He had received all that he could get from Finegas. His education was finished and the time had come to test it, and to try all else that he had of mind and body. He bade farewell to the gentle poet, and set out for Tara of the Kings.

It was Samhain tide, and the feast of Tara was being

held, at which all that was wise or skilful or well born in Ireland were gathered together. This is how Tara was when Tara was. There was the High King's palace with its fortification; without it was another fortification enclosing the four minor palaces, each of which was maintained by one of the four provincial kings; without that again was the great banqueting hall, and around it and enclosing all of the sacred hill in its gigantic bound ran the main outer ramparts of Tara. From it, the centre of Ireland, four great roads went, north, south, east, and west, and along these roads, from the top and the bottom and the two sides of Ireland, there moved for weeks before Samhain an endless stream of passengers.

Here a gay band went carrying rich treasure to decorate the pavilion of a Munster lord. On another road a vat of seasoned yew, monstrous as a house on wheels and drawn by an hundred laborious oxen, came bumping and joggling the ale that thirsty Connaught princes would drink. On a road again the learned men of Leinster, each with an idea in his head that would discomfit a northern ollav and make a

southern one gape and fidget, would be marching solemnly, each by a horse that was piled high on the back and widely at the sides with clean peeled willow or oaken wands, that were carved from the top to the bottom with the ogham signs; the first lines of poems (for it was an offence against wisdom to commit more than initial lines to writing), the names and dates of kings, the procession of laws of Tara and of the sub kingdoms, the names of places and their meanings. On the brown stallion ambling peacefully yonder there might go the warring of the gods for two or ten thousand years; this mare with the dainty pace and the vicious eye might be sidling under a load of oaken odes in honour of her owner's family, with a few bundles of tales of wonder added in case they might be useful; and perhaps the restive piebald was backing the history of Ireland into a ditch.

On such a journey all people spoke together, for all were friends, and no person regarded the weapon in another man's hand other than as an implement to poke a reluctant cow with, or to pacify with loud wallops some hoof proud

colt.

Into this teem and profusion of jolly humanity Fionn slipped, and if his mood had been as bellicose as a wounded boar he would yet have found no man to quarrel with, and if his eye had been as sharp as a jealous husband's he would have found no eye to meet it with calculation or menace or fear; for the Peace of Ireland was in being, and for six weeks man was neighbour to man, and the nation was the guest of the High King. Fionn went in with the notables.

His arrival had been timed for the opening day and the great feast of welcome. He may have marvelled, looking on the bright city, with its pillars of gleaming bronze and the roofs that were painted in many colours, so that each house seemed to be covered by the spreading wings of some gigantic and gorgeous bird. And the palaces themselves, mellow with red oak, polished within and without by the wear and the care of a thousand years, and carved with the patient skill of unending generations of the most famous artists of the most artistic country of the western

world, would have given him much to marvel at also. It must have seemed like a city of dream, a city to catch the heart, when, coming over the great plain, Fionn saw Tara of the Kings held on its hill as in a hand to gather all the gold of the falling sun, and to restore a brightness as mellow and tender as that universal largess.

In the great banqueting hall everything was in order for the feast. The nobles of Ireland with their winsome consorts, the learned and artistic professions represented by the pick of their time were in place. The Ard Ri, Corm of the Hundred Battles, had taken his place on the raised dais which commanded the whole of that vast hall. At his Right hand his son Art, to be afterwards as famous as his famous father, took his seat, and on his left Goll mor mac Morna, chief of the Fianna of Ireland, had the seat of honour. As the High King took his place he could see every person who was noted in the land for any reason. He would know every one who was present, for the fame of all men is sealed at Tara, and behind his chair a herald stood to tell anything the king might not

know or had forgotten.

Conn gave the signal and his guests seated themselves.

The time had come for the squires to take their stations behind their masters and mistresses. But, for the moment, the great room was seated, and the doors were held to allow a moment of respect to pass before the servers and squires came in.

Looking over his guests, Conn observed that a young man was yet standing.

"There is a gentleman," he murmured, "for whom no seat has been found."

We may be sure that the Master of the Banquet blushed at that.

"And," the king continued, "I do not seem to know the young man."

Nor did his herald, nor did the unfortunate Master, nor did anybody; for the eyes of all were now turned where the king's went.

"Give me my horn," said the gracious monarch.

The horn of state was put to his hand.

"Young gentleman," he called to the stranger, "I wish to drink to your health and to welcome you to Tara."

The young man came forward then, greater shouldered than any mighty man of that gathering, longer and cleaner limbed, with his fair curls dancing about his beardless face. The king put the great horn into his hand.

"Tell me your name," he commanded gently.

"I am Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Baiscne," said the youth.

And at that saying a touch as of lightning went through the gathering so that each person quivered, and the son of the great, murdered captain looked by the king's shoulder into the twinkling eye of Goll. But no word was uttered, no movement made except the movement and the utterance of the Ard Ri'.

"You are the son of a friend," said the great hearted monarch. "You shall have the seat of a friend."

He placed Fionn at the right hand of his own son Art.

CHAPTER XII

It is to be known that on the night of the Feast of Samhain the doors separating this world and the next one are opened, and the inhabitants of either world can leave their respective spheres and appear in the world of the other beings.

Now there was a grandson to the Dagda Mor, the Lord of the Underworld, and he was named Aillen mac Midna, out of Shi' Finnachy, and this Aillen bore an implacable enmity to Tara and the Ard Ri'.

As well as being monarch of Ireland her High King was chief of the people learned in magic, and it is possible that at some time Conn had adventured into Tir na n Og, the Land of the Young, and had done some deed or misdeed in Aillen's lordship or in his family. It must have been an ill deed in truth, for it was in a very rage of revenge that Aillen came yearly at the permitted time to ravage Tara.

Nine times he had come on this mission of revenge, but

it is not to be supposed that he could actually destroy the holy city: the Ard Ri' and magicians could prevent that, but he could yet do a damage so considerable that it was worth Conn's while to take special extra precautions against him, including the precaution of chance.

Therefore, when the feast was over and the banquet had commenced, the Hundred Fighter stood from his throne and looked over his assembled people.

The Chain of Silence was shaken by the attendant whose duty and honour was the Silver Chain, and at that delicate chime the halt went silent, and a general wonder ensued as to what matter the High King would submit to his people.

"Friends and heroes," said Conn, "Aillen, the son of Midna, will come to night from Slieve Fuaid with occult, terrible fire against our city. Is there among you one who loves Tara and the king, and who will undertake our defence against that being?"

He spoke in silence, and when he had finished he listened to the same silence, but it was now deep, ominous,

agonized. Each man glanced uneasily on his neighbour and then stared at his wine cup or his fingers. The hearts of young men went hot for a gallant moment and were chilled in the succeeding one, for they had all heard of Aillen out of Shl Finnachy in the north. The lesser gentlemen looked under their brows at the greater champions, and these peered furtively at the greatest of all. Art og mac Morna of the Hard Strokes fell to biting his fingers, Cona'n the Swearer and Garra mac Morna grumbled irritably to each other and at their neighbours, even Caelte, the son of Rona'n, looked down into his own lap, and Goll Mor sipped at his wine without any twinkle in his eye. A horrid embarrassment came into the great hall, and as the High King stood in that palpitating silence his noble face changed from kindly to grave and from that to a terrible sternness. In another moment, to the undying shame of every person present, he would have been compelled to lift his own challenge and declare himself the champion of Tara for that night, but the shame that was on the faces of his people would remain in the heart of their

king. Goll's merry mind would help him to forget, but even his heart would be wrung by a memory that he would not dare to face. It was at that terrible moment that Fionn stood up.

"What," said he, "will be given to the man who undertakes this defence?"

"All that can be rightly asked will be royally bestowed," was the king's answer.

"Who are the sureties?" said Fionn.

"The kings of Ireland, and Red Cith with his magicians."

"I will undertake the defence," said Fionn. And on that, the kings and magicians who were present bound themselves to the fulfilment of the bargain.

Fionn marched from the banqueting hall, and as he went, all who were present of nobles and retainers and servants acclaimed him and wished him luck. But in their hearts they were bidding him good bye, for all were assured that the lad was marching to a death so unescapeable that he might

already be counted as a dead man.

It is likely that Fionn looked for help to the people of the Shi' themselves, for, through his mother, he belonged to the tribes of Dana, although, on the father's side, his blood was well compounded with mortal clay. It may be, too, that he knew how events would turn, for he had eaten the Salmon of Knowledge. Yet it is not recorded that on this occasion he invoked any magical art as he did on other adventures.

Fionn's way of discovering whatever was happening and hidden was always the same and is many times referred to. A shallow, oblong dish of pure, pale gold was brought to him. This dish was filled with clear water. Then Fionn would bend his head and stare into the water, and as he stared he would place his thumb in his mouth under his "Tooth of Knowledge," his "wisdom tooth."

Knowledge, may it be said, is higher than magic and is more to be sought. It is quite possible to see what is happening and yet not know what is forward, for while seeing is believing it does not follow that either seeing or

believing is knowing. Many a person can see a thing and believe a thing and know just as little about it as the person who does neither. But Fionn would see and know, or he would under stand a decent ratio of his visions. That he was versed in magic is true, for he was ever known as the Knowledgeable man, and later he had two magicians in his household named Dirim and mac Reith to do the rough work of knowledge for their busy master.

It was not from the Shi', however, that assistance came to Fionn.

CHAPTER XIII

He marched through the successive fortifications until he came to the outer, great wall, the boundary of the city, and when he had passed this he was on the wide plain of Tara.

Other than himself no person was abroad, for on the night of the Feast of Samhain none but a madman would quit the shelter of a house even if it were on fire; for whatever

disasters might be within a house would be as nothing to the calamities without it.

The noise of the banquet was not now audible to Fionn it is possible, however, that there was a shamefaced silence in the great hall and the lights of the city were hidden by the successive great ramparts. The sky was over him; the earth under him; and than these there was nothing, or there was but the darkness and the wind.

But darkness was not a thing to terrify him, bred in the nightness of a wood and the very fosterling of gloom; nor could the wind afflict his ear or his heart. There was no note in its orchestra that he had not brooded on and become, which becoming is magic. The long drawn moan of it; the thrilling whisper and hush; the shrill, sweet whistle, so thin it can scarcely be heard, and is taken more by the nerves than by the ear; the screech, sudden as a devil's yell and loud as ten thunders; the cry as of one who flies with backward look to the shelter of leaves and darkness; and the sob as of one stricken with an age long misery, only at times remembered,

but remembered then with what a pang! His ear knew by what successions they arrived, and by what stages they grew and diminished. Listening in the dark to the bundle of noises which make a noise he could disentangle them and assign a place and a reason to each gradation of sound that formed the chorus: there was the patter of a rabbit, and there the scurrying of a hare; a bush rustled yonder, but that brief rustle was a bird; that pressure was a wolf, and this hesitation a fox; the scraping yonder was but a rough leaf against bark, and the scratching beyond it was a ferret's claw.

Fear cannot be where knowledge is, and Fionn was not fearful.

His mind, quietly busy on all sides, picked up one sound and dwelt on it. "A man," said Fionn, and he listened in that direction, back towards the city.

A man it was, almost as skilled in darkness as Fionn himself "This is no enemy," Fionn thought; "his walking is open."

"Who comes?" he called.

"A friend," said the newcomer.

"Give a friend's name," said Fionn.

"Fiacuil mac Cona," was the answer.

"Ah, my pulse and heart!" cried Fionn, and he strode a few paces to meet the great robber who had fostered him among the marshes.

"So you are not afraid," he said joyfully.

"I am afraid in good truth," Fiacuil whispered, "and the minute my business with you is finished I will trot back as quick as legs will carry me. May the gods protect my going as they protected my coming," said the robber piously.

"Amen," said Fionn, "and now, tell me what you have come for?"

"Have you any plan against this lord of the Shf?" Fiacuil whispered.

"I will attack him," said Fionn.

"That is not a plan," the other groaned, "we do not plan to deliver an attack hut to win a victory."

"Is this a very terrible person?" Fionn asked.

"Terrible indeed. No one can get near him or away from him. He comes out of the Shi' playing sweet, low music on a timpan and a pipe, and all who hear this music fall asleep."

"I will not fall asleep," said Fionn.

"You will indeed, for everybody does."

"What happens then?" Fionn asked.

"When all are asleep Aillen mac Midna blows a dart of fire out of his mouth, and everything that is touched by that fire is destroyed, and he can blow his fire to an incredible distance and to any direction."

"You are very brave to come to help me," Fionn murmured, "especially when you are not able to help me at all."

"I can help," Fiacuil replied, "but I must be paid."

"What payment?"

"A third of all you earn and a seat at your council."

"I grant that," said Fionn, "and now, tell me your plan?"

"You remember my spear with the thirty rivets of Arabian gold in its socket?"

"The one," Fionn queried, "that had its head wrapped in a blanket and was stuck in a bucket of water and was chained to a wall as well the venomous Birgha?" "That one," Fiacuil replied.

"It is Aillen mac Midna's own spear," he continued, "and it was taken out of his Shi' by your father."

"Well?" said Fionn, wondering nevertheless where Fiacuil got the spear, but too generous to ask.

"When you hear the great man of the Shi' coming, take the wrappings off the head of the spear and bend your face over it; the heat of the spear, the stench of it, all its pernicious and acrid qualities will prevent you from going to sleep."

"Are you sure of that?" said Fionn.

"You couldn't go to sleep close to that stench; nobody could," Fiacuil replied decidedly.

He continued: "Aillen mac Midna will be off his guard when he stops playing and begins to blow his fire; he will think everybody is asleep; then you can deliver the attack you were speaking of, and all good luck go with it."

"I will give him back his spear," said Fionn.

"Here it is," said Fiacuil, taking the Birgha from under his cloak. "But be as careful of it, my pulse, be as frightened of it as you are of the man of Dana."

"I will be frightened of nothing," said Fionn, "and the only person I will be sorry for is that Aillen mac Midna, who is going to get his own spear back."

"I will go away now," his companion whispered, "for it is growing darker where you would have thought there was no more room for darkness, and there is an eerie feeling abroad which I do not like. That man from the Shi' may come any minute, and if I catch one sound of his music I am done for."

The robber went away and again Fionn was alone.

CHAPTER XIV

He listened to the retreating footsteps until they could be heard no more, and the one sound that came to his tense ears was the beating of his own heart.

Even the wind had ceased, and there seemed to be nothing in the world but the darkness and himself. In that gigantic blackness, in that unseen quietude and vacancy, the mind could cease to be personal to itself. It could be overwhelmed and merged in space, so that consciousness would be transferred or dissipated, and one might sleep standing; for the mind fears loneliness more than all else, and will escape to the moon rather than be driven inwards on its own being.

But Fionn was not lonely, and he was not afraid when the son of Midna came.

A long stretch of the silent night had gone by, minute following minute in a slow sequence, wherein as there was no change there was no time; wherein there was no past and

no future, but a stupefying, endless present which is almost the annihilation of consciousness. A change came then, for the clouds had also been moving and the moon at last was sensed behind them not as a radiance, but as a percolation of light, a gleam that was strained through matter after matter and was less than the very wraith or remembrance of itself; a thing seen so narrowly, so sparsely, that the eye could doubt if it was or was not seeing, and might conceive that its own memory was re creating that which was still absent.

But Fionn's eye was the eye of a wild creature that spies on darkness and moves there wittingly. He saw, then, not a thing but a movement; something that was darker than the darkness it loomed on; not a being but a presence, and, as it were, impending pressure. And in a little he heard the deliberate pace of that great being.

Fionn bent to his spear and unloosed its coverings.

Then from the darkness there came another sound; a low, sweet sound; thrillingly joyous, thrillingly low; so low the ear could scarcely note it, so sweet the ear wished to catch

nothing else and would strive to hear it rather than all sounds that may be heard by man: the music of another world! the unearthly, dear melody of the Shi'! So sweet it was that the sense strained to it, and having reached must follow drowsily in its wake, and would merge in it, and could not return again to its own place until that strange harmony was finished and the ear restored to freedom.

But Fionn had taken the covering from his spear, and with his brow pressed close to it he kept his mind and all his senses engaged on that sizzling, murderous point.

The music ceased and Aillen hissed a fierce blue flame from his mouth, and it was as though he hissed lightning.

Here it would seem that Fionn used magic, for spreading out his fringed mantle he caught the flame. Rather he stopped it, for it slid from the mantle and sped down into the earth to the depth of twenty six spans; from which that slope is still called the Glen of the Mantle, and the rise on which Aillen stood is known as the Ard of Fire.

One can imagine the surprise of Aillen mac Midna,

seeing his fire caught and quenched by an invisible hand. And one can imagine that at this check he might be frightened, for who would be more terrified than a magician who sees his magic fail, and who, knowing of power, will guess at powers of which he has no conception and may well dread.

Everything had been done by him as it should be done. His pipe had been played and his timpan, all who heard that music should be asleep, and yet his fire was caught in full course and was quenched.

Aillen, with all the terrific strength of which he was master, blew again, and the great jet of blue flame came roaring and whistling from him and was caught and disappeared.

Panic swirled into the man from Faery; he turned from that terrible spot and fled, not knowing what might be behind, but dreading it as he had never before dreaded anything, and the unknown pursued him; that terrible defence became offence and hung to his heel as a wolf pads by the flank of a

bull.

And Aillen was not in his own world! He was in the world of men, where movement is not easy and the very air a burden. In his own sphere, in his own element, he might have outrun Fionn, but this was Fionn's world, Fionn's element, and the flying god was not gross enough to outstrip him. Yet what a race he gave, for it was but at the entrance to his own Shi' that the pursuer got close enough. Fionn put a finger into the thong of the great spear, and at that cast night fell on Aillen mac Midna. His eyes went black, his mind whirled and ceased, there came nothingness where he had been, and as the Birgha whistled into his shoulder blades he withered away, he tumbled emptily and was dead. Fionn took his lovely head from its shoulders and went back through the night to Tara.

Triumphant Fionn, who had dealt death to a god, and to whom death would be dealt, and who is now dead!

He reached the palace at sunrise.

On that morning all were astir early. They wished to see

what destruction had been wrought by the great being, but it was young Fionn they saw and that redoubtable head swinging by its hair. "What is your demand?" said the Ard Ri'. "The thing that it is right I should ask," said Fionn: "the command of the Fianna of Ireland."

"Make your choice," said Conn to Goll Mor; "you will leave Ireland, or you will place your hand in the hand of this champion and be his man."

Goll could do a thing that would be hard for another person, and he could do it so beautifully that he was not diminished by any action.

"Here is my hand," said Goll.

And he twinkled at the stern, young eyes that gazed on him as he made his submission.

THE BIRTH OF BRAN

CHAPTER I

There are people who do not like dogs a bit they are usually women but in this story there is a man who did not like dogs. In fact, he hated them. When he saw one he used to go black in the face, and he threw rocks at it until it got out of sight. But the Power that protects all creatures had put a squint into this man's eye, so that he always threw crooked.

This gentleman's name was Fergus Fionnliath, and his stronghold was near the harbour of Galway. Whenever a dog barked he would leap out of his seat, and he would throw everything that he owned out of the window in the direction of the bark. He gave prizes to servants who disliked dogs, and when he heard that a man had drowned a litter of pups he used to visit that person and try to marry his daughter.

Now Fionn, the son of Uail, was the reverse of Fergus Fionnliath in this matter, for he delighted in dogs, and he

knew everything about them from the setting of the first little white tooth to the rocking of the last long yellow one. He knew the affections and antipathies which are proper in a dog; the degree of obedience to which dogs may be trained without losing their honourable qualities or becoming servile and suspicious; he knew the hopes that animate them, the apprehensions which tingle in their blood, and all that is to be demanded from, or forgiven in, a paw, an ear, a nose, an eye, or a tooth; and he understood these things because he loved dogs, for it is by love alone that we understand anything.

Among the three hundred dogs which Fionn owned there were two to whom he gave an especial tenderness, and who were his daily and nightly companions. These two were Bran and Sceo'lan, but if a person were to guess for twenty years he would not find out why Fionn loved these two dogs and why he would never be separated from them.

Fionn's mother, Muirne, went to wide Allen of Leinster to visit her son, and she brought her young sister Tuiren with her. The mother and aunt of the great captain were well

treated among the Fianna, first, because they were parents to Fionn, and second, because they were beautiful and noble women.

No words can describe how delightful Muirne was she took the branch; and as to Tuiren, a man could not look at her without becoming angry or dejected. Her face was fresh as a spring morning; her voice more cheerful than the cuckoo calling from the branch that is highest in the hedge; and her form swayed like a reed and flowed like a river, so that each person thought she would surely flow to him.

Men who had wives of their own grew moody and downcast because they could not hope to marry her, while the bachelors of the Fianna stared at each other with truculent, bloodshot eyes, and then they gazed on Tuiren so gently that she may have imagined she was being beamed on by the mild eyes of the dawn.

It was to an Ulster gentleman, Iollan Eachtach, that she gave her love, and this chief stated his rights and qualities and asked for her in marriage.

Now Fionn did not dislike the man of Ulster, but either he did not know them well or else he knew them too well, for he made a curious stipulation before consenting to the marriage. He bound Iollan to return the lady if there should be occasion to think her unhappy, and Iollan agreed to do so. The sureties to this bargain were Caelte mac Ronan, Goll mac Morna, and Lugaidh. Lugaidh himself gave the bride away, but it was not a pleasant ceremony for him, because he also was in love with the lady, and he would have preferred keeping her to giving her away. When she had gone he made a poem about her, beginning: "There is no more light in the sky "

And hundreds of sad people learned the poem by heart.

CHAPTER II

When Iollan and Tuiren were married they went to Ulster, and they lived together very happily. But the law of life is change; nothing continues in the same way for any length of time; happiness must become unhappiness, and will be succeeded again by the joy it had displaced. The past also must be reckoned with; it is seldom as far behind us as we could wish: it is more often in front, blocking the way, and the future trips over it just when we think that the road is clear and joy our own.

Iollan had a past. He was not ashamed of it; he merely thought it was finished, although in truth it was only beginning, for it is that perpetual beginning of the past that we call the future.

Before he joined the Fianna he had been in love with a lady of the Shi', named Uct Dealv (Fair Breast), and they had been sweethearts for years. How often he had visited his sweetheart in Faery! With what eagerness and anticipation he

had gone there; the lover's whistle that he used to give was known to every person in that Shi', and he had been discussed by more than one of the delicate sweet ladies of Faery. "That is your whistle, Fair Breast," her sister of the Shi' would say.

And Uct Dealv would reply: "Yes, that is my mortal, my lover, my pulse, and my one treasure."

She laid her spinning aside, or her embroidery if she was at that, or if she were baking a cake of fine wheaten bread mixed with honey she would leave the cake to bake itself and fly to Iollan. Then they went hand in hand in the country that smells of apple blossom and honey, looking on heavy boughed trees and on dancing and beaming clouds. Or they stood dreaming together, locked in a clasping of arms and eyes, gazing up and down on each other, Iollan staring down into sweet grey wells that peeped and flickered under thin brows, and Uct Dealv looking up into great black ones that went dreamy and went hot in endless alternation.

Then Iollan would go back to the world of men, and Uct Dealv would return to her occupations in the Land of the

Ever Young.

"What did he say?" her sister of the Shi' would ask.

"He said I was the Berry of the Mountain, the Star of Knowledge, and the Blossom of the Raspberry."

"They always say the same thing," her sister pouted.

"But they look other things," Uct Dealv insisted. "They feel other things," she murmured; and an endless conversation recommenced.

Then for some time Iollan did not come to Faery, and Uct Dealv marvelled at that, while her sister made an hundred surmises, each one worse than the last.

"He is not dead or he would be here," she said. "He has forgotten you, my darling."

News was brought to Tlr na n Og of the marriage of Iollan and Tuiren, and when Uct Dealv heard that news her heart ceased to beat for a moment, and she closed her eyes.

"Now!" said her sister of the Shi'. "That is how long the love of a mortal lasts," she added, in the voice of sad triumph which is proper to sisters.

But on Uct Dealv there came a rage of jealousy and despair such as no person in the Shi' had ever heard of, and from that moment she became capable of every ill deed; for there are two things not easily controlled, and they are hunger and jealousy. She determined that the woman who had supplanted her in Iollan's affections should rue the day she did it. She pondered and brooded revenge in her heart, sitting in thoughtful solitude and bitter collectedness until at last she had a plan.

She understood the arts of magic and shape changing, so she changed her shape into that of Fionn's female runner, the best known woman in Ireland; then she set out from Faery and appeared in the world. She travelled in the direction of Iollan's stronghold.

Iollan knew the appearance of Fionn's messenger, but he was surprised to see her.

She saluted him.

"Health and long life, my master.".

"Health and good days," he replied. "What brings you

here, dear heart?"

"I come from Fionn."

"And your message?" said he.

"The royal captain intends to visit you."

"He will be welcome," said Iollan. "We shall give him an Ulster feast."

"The world knows what that is," said the messenger courteously. "And now," she continued, "I have messages for your queen."

Tuiren then walked from the house with the messenger, but when they had gone a short distance Uct Dealv drew a hazel rod from beneath her cloak and struck it on the queen's shoulder, and on the instant Tuiren's figure trembled and quivered, and it began to whirl inwards and downwards, and she changed into the appearance of a hound.

It was sad to see the beautiful, slender dog standing shivering and astonished, and sad to see the lovely eyes that looked out pitifully in terror and amazement. But Uct Dealv did not feel sad. She clasped a chain about the hound's neck,

and they set off westward towards the house of Fergus Fionnliath, who was reputed to be the unfriendliest man in the world to a dog. It was because of his reputation that Uct Dealv was bringing the hound to him. She did not want a good home for this dog: she wanted the worst home that could be found in the world, and she thought that Fergus would revenge for her the rage and jealousy which she felt towards Tuiren.

CHAPTER III

As they paced along Uct Dealv railed bitterly against the hound, and shook and jerked her chain. Many a sharp cry the hound gave in that journey, many a mild lament.

"Ah, supplanter! Ah, taker of another girl's sweetheart!" said Uct Dealv fiercely. "How would your lover take it if he could see you now? How would he look if he saw your pointy ears, your long thin snout, your shivering, skinny legs, and your long grey tail. He would not love you now, bad

girl!"

"Have you heard of Fergus Fionnliath," she said again, "the man who does not like dogs?"

Tuiren had indeed heard of him.

"It is to Fergus I shall bring you," cried Uct Dealv. "He will throw stones at you. You have never had a stone thrown at you. Ah, bad girl! You do not know how a stone sounds as it nips the ear with a whirling buzz, nor how jagged and heavy it feels as it thumps against a skinny leg. Robber! Mortal! Bad girl! You have never been whipped, but you will be whipped now. You shall hear the song of a lash as it curls forward and bites inward and drags backward. You shall dig up old bones stealthily at night, and chew them against famine. You shall whine and squeal at the moon, and shiver in the cold, and you will never take another girl's sweetheart again."

And it was in those terms and in that tone that she spoke to Tuiren as they journeyed forward, so that the hound trembled and shrank, and whined pitifully and in despair.

They came to Fergus Fionnliath's stronghold, and Uct Dealv demanded admittance.

"Leave that dog outside," said the servant.

"I will not do so," said the pretended messenger.

"You can come in without the dog, or you can stay out with the dog," said the surly guardian.

"By my hand," cried Uct Dealv, "I will come in with this dog, or your master shall answer for it to Fionn."

At the name of Fionn the servant almost fell out of his standing. He flew to acquaint his master, and Fergus himself came to the great door of the stronghold.

"By my faith," he cried in amazement, "it is a dog."

"A dog it is," growled the glum servant.

"Go you away," said Fergus to Uct Dealv, "and when you have killed the dog come back to me and I will give you a present."

"Life and health, my good master, from Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Baiscne," said she to Fergus.

"Life and health back to Fionn," he replied. "Come into

the house and give your message, but leave the dog outside, for I don't like dogs."

"The dog comes in," the messenger replied.

"How is that?" cried Fergus angrily.

"Fionn sends you this hound to take care of until he comes for her," said the messenger.

"I wonder at that," Fergus growled, "for Fionn knows well that there is not a man in the world has less of a liking for dogs than I have."

"However that may be, master, I have given Fionn's message, and here at my heel is the dog. Do you take her or refuse her?"

"If I could refuse anything to Fionn it would be a dog," said Fergus, "but I could not refuse anything to Fionn, so give me the hound."

Uct Dealv put the chain in his hand.

"Ah, bad dog!" said she.

And then she went away well satisfied with her revenge, and returned to her own people in the Shi.

CHAPTER IV

On the following day Fergus called his servant.

"Has that dog stopped shivering yet?" he asked.

"It has not, sir," said the servant.

"Bring the beast here," said his master, "for whoever else is dissatisfied Fionn must be satisfied."

The dog was brought, and he examined it with a jaundiced and bitter eye.

"It has the shivers indeed," he said.

"The shivers it has," said the servant.

"How do you cure the shivers?" his master demanded, for he thought that if the animal's legs dropped off Fionn would not be satisfied.

"There is a way," said the servant doubtfully.

"If there is a way, tell it to me," cried his master angrily.

"If you were to take the beast up in your arms and hug it and kiss it, the shivers would stop," said the man.

"Do you mean ?" his master thundered, and he stretched

his hand for a club.

"I heard that," said the servant humbly.

"Take that dog up," Fergus commanded, "and hug it and kiss it, and if I find a single shiver left in the beast I'll break your head."

The man bent to the hound, but it snapped a piece out of his hand, and nearly bit his nose off as well.

"That dog doesn't like me," said the man.

"Nor do I," roared Fergus; "get out of my sight."

The man went away and Fergus was left alone with the hound, but the poor creature was so terrified that it began to tremble ten times worse than before.

"Its legs will drop off," said Fergus. "Fionn will blame me," he cried in despair. He walked to the hound.

"If you snap at my nose, or if you put as much as the start of a tooth into the beginning of a finger!" he growled.

He picked up the dog, but it did not snap, it only trembled. He held it gingerly for a few moments.

"If it has to be hugged," he said, "I'll hug it. I'd do more

than that for Fionn."

He tucked and tightened the animal into his breast, and marched moodily up and down the room. The dog's nose lay along his breast under his chin, and as he gave it dutiful hugs, one hug to every five paces, the dog put out its tongue and licked him timidly under the chin.

"Stop," roared Fergus, "stop that forever," and he grew very red in the face, and stared truculently down along his nose. A soft brown eye looked up at him and the shy tongue touched again on his chin.

"If it has to be kissed," said Fergus gloomily, "I'll kiss it; I'd do more than that for Fionn," he groaned.

He bent his head, shut his eyes, and brought the dog's jaw against his lips. And at that the dog gave little wriggles in his arms, and little barks, and little licks, so that he could scarcely hold her. He put the hound down at last.

"There is not a single shiver left in her," he said.

And that was true.

Everywhere he walked the dog followed him, giving

little prances and little pats against him, and keeping her eyes fixed on his with such eagerness and intelligence that he marvelled.

"That dog likes me," he murmured in amazement.

"By my hand," he cried next day, "I like that dog."

The day after that he was calling her "My One Treasure, My Little Branch." And within a week he could not bear her to be out of his sight for an instant.

He was tormented by the idea that some evil person might throw a stone at the hound, so he assembled his servants and retainers and addressed them.

He told them that the hound was the Queen of Creatures, the Pulse of his Heart, and the Apple of his Eye, and he warned them that the person who as much as looked sideways on her, or knocked one shiver out of her, would answer for the deed with pains and indignities. He recited a list of calamities which would befall such a miscreant, and these woes began with flaying and ended with dismemberment, and had inside bits of such complicated

and ingenious torment that the blood of the men who heard it ran chill in their veins, and the women of the household fainted where they stood.

CHAPTER V

In course of time the news came to Fionn that his mother's sister was not living with Iollan. He at once sent a messenger calling for fulfilment of the pledge that had been given to the Fianna, and demanding the instant return of Tuiren. Iollan was in a sad condition when this demand was made. He guessed that Uct Dealv had a hand in the disappearance of his queen, and he begged that time should be given him in which to find the lost girl. He promised if he could not discover her within a certain period that he would deliver his body into Fionn's hands, and would abide by whatever judgement Fionn might pronounce. The great captain agreed to that.

"Tell the wife loser that I will have the girl or I will have

his head," said Fionn.

Iollan set out then for Faery. He knew the way, and in no great time he came to the hill where Uct Dealv was.

It was hard to get Uct Dealv to meet him, but at last she consented, and they met under the apple boughs of Faery.

"Well!" said Uct Dealv. "Ah! Breaker of Vows and Traitor to Love," said she.

"Hail and a blessing," said Iollan humbly.

"By my hand," she cried, "I will give you no blessing, for it was no blessing you left with me when we parted."

"I am in danger," said Iollan.

"What is that to me?" she replied fiercely.

"Fionn may claim my head," he murmured.

"Let him claim what he can take," said she.

"No," said Iollan proudly, "he will claim what I can give."

"Tell me your tale," said she coldly.

Iollan told his story then, and, he concluded, "I am

certain that you have hidden the girl."

"If I save your head from Fionn," the woman of the Shi' replied, "then your head will belong to me."

"That is true," said Iollan.

"And if your head is mine, the body that goes under it is mine. Do you agree to that?"

"I do," said Iollan.

"Give me your pledge," said Uct Dealv, "that if I save you from this danger you will keep me as your sweetheart until the end of life and time."

"I give that pledge," said Iollan.

Uct Dealv went then to the house of Fergus Fionnliath, and she broke the enchantment that was on the hound, so that Tuiren's own shape came back to her; but in the matter of two small whelps, to which the hound had given birth, the enchantment could not be broken, so they had to remain as they were. These two whelps were Bran and Sceo'lan. They were sent to Fionn, and he loved them for ever after, for they were loyal and affectionate, as only dogs can be, and they

were as intelligent as human beings. Besides that, they were Fionn's own cousins.

Tuiren was then asked in marriage by Lugaidh who had loved her so long. He had to prove to her that he was not any other woman's sweetheart, and when he proved that they were married, and they lived happily ever after, which is the proper way to live. He wrote a poem beginning: "Lovely the day. Dear is the eye of the dawn "

And a thousand merry people learned it after him.

But as to Fergus Fionnliath, he took to his bed, and he stayed there for a year and a day suffering from blighted affection, and he would have died in the bed only that Fionn sent him a special pup, and in a week that young hound became the Star of Fortune and the very Pulse of his Heart, so that he got well again, and he also lived happily ever after.

OISIN'S MOTHER

CHAPTER I

EVENING was drawing nigh, and the Fianna Finn had decided to hunt no more that day. The hounds were whistled to heel, and a sober, homeward march began. For men will walk soberly in the evening, however they go in the day, and dogs will take the mood from their masters. They were pacing so, through the golden shafted, tender coloured eve, when a fawn leaped suddenly from covert, and, with that leap, all quietness vanished: the men shouted, the dogs gave tongue, and a furious chase commenced.

Fionn loved a chase at any hour, and, with Bran and Sceo'lan, he outstripped the men and dogs of his troop, until nothing remained in the limpid world but Fionn, the two hounds, and the nimble, beautiful fawn. These, and the occasional boulders, round which they raced, or over which they scrambled; the solitary tree which dozed aloof and

beautiful in the path, the occasional clump of trees that hived sweet shadow as a hive hoards honey, and the rustling grass that stretched to infinity, and that moved and crept and swung under the breeze in endless, rhythmic billowings.

In his wildest moment Fionn was thoughtful, and now, although running hard, he was thoughtful. There was no movement of his beloved hounds that he did not know; not a twitch or fling of the head, not a cock of the ears or tail that was not significant to him. But on this chase whatever signs the dogs gave were not understood by their master.

He had never seen them in such eager flight. They were almost utterly absorbed in it, but they did not whine with eagerness, nor did they cast any glance towards him for the encouraging word which he never failed to give when they sought it.

They did look at him, but it was a look which he could not comprehend. There was a question and a statement in those deep eyes, and he could not understand what that question might be, nor what it was they sought to convey.

Now and again one of the dogs turned a head in full flight, and stared, not at Fionn, but distantly backwards, over the spreading and swelling plain where their companions of the hunt had disappeared. "They are looking for the other hounds," said Fionn.

"And yet they do not give tongue! Tongue it, a Vran!" he shouted, "Bell it out, a Heo'lan!"

It was then they looked at him, the look which he could not understand and had never seen on a chase. They did not tongue it, nor bell it, but they added silence to silence and speed to speed, until the lean grey bodies were one pucker and lashing of movement.

Fionn marvelled. "They do not want the other dogs to hear or to come on this chase," he murmured, and he wondered what might be passing within those slender heads.

"The fawn runs well," his thought continued. "What is it, a Vran, my heart? After her, a Heo'lan! Hist and away, my loves !"

"There is going and to spare in that beast yet," his mind

went on. "She is not stretched to the full, nor half stretched. She may outrun even Bran," he thought ragingly.

They were racing through a smooth valley in a steady, beautiful, speedy flight when, suddenly, the fawn stopped and lay on the grass, and it lay with the calm of an animal that has no fear, and the leisure of one that is not pressed.

"Here is a change," said Fionn, staring in astonishment.

"She is not winded," he said. "What is she lying down for?" But Bran and Sceo'lan did not stop; they added another inch to their long stretched easy bodies, and came up on the fawn.

"It is an easy kill," said Fionn regretfully. "They have her," he cried.

But he was again astonished, for the dogs did not kill. They leaped and played about the fawn, licking its face, and rubbing delighted noses against its neck.

Fionn came up then. His long spear was lowered in his fist at the thrust, and his sharp knife was in its sheath, but he did not use them, for the fawn and the two hounds began to

play round him, and the fawn was as affectionate towards him as the hounds were; so that when a velvet nose was thrust in his palm, it was as often a fawn's muzzle as a hound's.

In that joyous company he came to wide Allen of Leinster, where the people were surprised to see the hounds and the fawn and the Chief and none other of the hunters that had set out with them.

When the others reached home, the Chief told of his chase, and it was agreed that such a fawn must not be killed, but that it should be kept and well treated, and that it should be the pet fawn of the Fianna. But some of those who remembered Brah's parentage thought that as Bran herself had come from the Shi so this fawn might have come out of the Shi also.

CHAPTER II

Late that night, when he was preparing for rest, the door of Fionn’s chamber opened gently and a young woman came into the room. The captain stared at her, as he well might, for he had never seen or imagined to see a woman so beautiful as this was. Indeed, she was not a woman, but a young girl, and her bearing was so gently noble, her look so modestly high, that the champion dared scarcely look at her, although he could not by any means have looked away.

As she stood within the doorway, smiling, and shy as a flower, beautifully timid as a fawn, the Chief communed with his heart.

"She is the Sky woman of the Dawn," he said. "She is the light on the foam. She is white and odorous as an apple blossom. She smells of spice and honey. She is my beloved beyond the women of the world. She shall never be taken from me."

And that thought was delight and anguish to him:

delight because of such sweet prospect, anguish because it was not yet realised, and might not be.

As the dogs had looked at him on the chase with a look that he did not understand, so she looked at him, and in her regard there was a question that baffled him and a statement which he could not follow.

He spoke to her then, mastering his heart to do it.

"I do not seem to know you," he said.

"You do not know me indeed," she replied.

"It is the more wonderful," he continued gently, "for I should know every person that is here. What do you require from me?"

"I beg your protection, royal captain."

"I give that to all," he answered. "Against whom do you desire protection?"

"I am in terror of the Fear Doirche."

"The Dark Man of the Shi?"

"He is my enemy," she said.

"He is mine now," said Fionn. "Tell me your story."

"My name is Saeve, and I am a woman of Faery," she commenced. "In the Shi' many men gave me their love, but I gave my love to no man of my country."

"That was not reasonable," the other chided with a blithe heart.

"I was contented," she replied, "and what we do not want we do not lack. But if my love went anywhere it went to a mortal, a man of the men of Ireland."

"By my hand," said Fionn in mortal distress, "I marvel who that man can be!"

"He is known to you," she murmured. "I lived thus in the peace of Faery, hearing often of my mortal champion, for the rumour of his great deeds had gone through the Shi', until a day came when the Black Magician of the Men of God put his eye on me, and, after that day, in whatever direction I looked I saw his eye."

She stopped at that, and the terror that was in her heart was on her face. "He is everywhere," she whispered. "He is in the bushes, and on the hill. He looked up at me from the

water, and he stared down on me from the sky. His voice commands out of the spaces, and it demands secretly in the heart. He is not here or there, he is in all places at all times. I cannot escape from him," she said, "and I am afraid," and at that she wept noiselessly and stared on Fionn.

"He is my enemy," Fionn growled. "I name him as my enemy."

"You will protect me," she implored.

"Where I am let him not come," said Fionn. "I also have knowledge. I am Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Baiscne, a man among men and a god where the gods are."

"He asked me in marriage," she continued, "but my mind was full of my own dear hero, and I refused the Dark Man."

"That was your right, and I swear by my hand that if the man you desire is alive and unmarried he shall marry you or he will answer to me for the refusal."

"He is not married," said Saeve, "and you have small control over him." The Chief frowned thoughtfully. "Except

the High King and the kings I have authority in this land."

"What man has authority over himself?" said Saeve.

"Do you mean that I am the man you seek?" said Fionn.

"It is to yourself I gave my love," she replied. "This is good news," Fionn cried joyfully, "for the moment you came through the door I loved and desired you, and the thought that you wished for another man went into my heart like a sword." Indeed, Fionn loved Saeve as he had not loved a woman before and would never love one again. He loved her as he had never loved anything before. He could not bear to be away from her. When he saw her he did not see the world, and when he saw the world without her it was as though he saw nothing, or as if he looked on a prospect that was bleak and depressing. The belling of a stag had been music to Fionn, but when Saeve spoke that was sound enough for him. He had loved to hear the cuckoo calling in the spring from the tree that is highest in the hedge, or the blackbird's jolly whistle in an autumn bush, or the thin, sweet enchantment that comes to the mind when a lark thrills out of sight in the

air and the hushed fields listen to the song. But his wife's voice was sweeter to Fionn than the singing of a lark. She filled him with wonder and surmise. There was magic in the tips of her fingers. Her thin palm ravished him. Her slender foot set his heart beating; and whatever way her head moved there came a new shape of beauty to her face.

"She is always new," said Fionn. "She is always better than any other woman; she is always better than herself."

He attended no more to the Fianna. He ceased to hunt. He did not listen to the songs of poets or the curious sayings of magicians, for all of these were in his wife, and something that was beyond these was in her also.

"She is this world and the next one; she is completion," said Fionn.

CHAPTER III

It happened that the men of Lochlann came on an expedition against Ireland. A monstrous fleet rounded the bluffs of Ben Edair, and the Danes landed there, to prepare an attack which would render them masters of the country. Fionn and the Fianna Finn marched against them. He did not like the men of Lochlann at any time, but this time he moved against them in wrath, for not only were they attacking Ireland, but they had come between him and the deepest joy his life had known.

It was a hard fight, but a short one. The Lochlannachs were driven back to their ships, and within a week the only Danes remaining in Ireland were those that had been buried there.

That finished, he left the victorious Fianna and returned swiftly to the plain of Allen, for he could not bear to be one unnecessary day parted from Saeve.

"You are not leaving us!" exclaimed Goll mac Morna.

"I must go," Fionn replied.

"You will not desert the victory feast," Conan reproached him.

"Stay with us, Chief," Caelte begged.

"What is a feast without Fionn?" they complained.

But he would not stay.

"By my hand," he cried, "I must go. She will be looking for me from the window."

"That will happen indeed," Goll admitted.

"That will happen," cried Fionn. "And when she sees me far out on the plain, she will run through the great gate to meet me."

"It would be the queer wife would neglect that run," Cona'n growled.

"I shall hold her hand again," Fionn entrusted to Caelte's ear.

"You will do that, surely."

"I shall look into her face," his lord insisted. But he saw that not even beloved Caelte understood the meaning of that,

and he knew sadly and yet proudly that what he meant could not be explained by any one and could not be comprehended by any one.

"You are in love, dear heart," said Caelte.

"In love he is," Cona'n grumbled. "A cordial for women, a disease for men, a state of wretchedness."

"Wretched in truth," the Chief murmured. "Love makes us poor We have not eyes enough to see all that is to be seen, nor hands enough to seize the tenth of all we want. When I look in her eyes I am tormented because I am not looking at her lips, and when I see her lips my soul cries out, 'Look at her eyes, look at her eyes.'"

"That is how it happens," said Goll rememberingly.

"That way and no other," Caelte agreed.

And the champions looked backwards in time on these lips and those, and knew their Chief would go.

When Fionn came in sight of the great keep his blood and his feet quickened, and now and again he waved a spear in the air.

"She does not see me yet," he thought mournfully.

"She cannot see me yet," he amended, reproaching himself.

But his mind was troubled, for he thought also, or he felt without thinking, that had the positions been changed he would have seen her at twice the distance.

"She thinks I have been unable to get away from the battle, or that I was forced to remain for the feast."

And, without thinking it, he thought that had the positions been changed he would have known that nothing could retain the one that was absent.

"Women," he said, "are shamefaced, they do not like to appear eager when others are observing them."

But he knew that he would not have known if others were observing him, and that he would not have cared about it if he had known. And he knew that his Saeve would not have seen, and would not have cared for any eyes than his.

He gripped his spear on that reflection, and ran as he had not run in his life, so that it was a panting, dishevelled

man that raced heavily through the gates of the great Dun.

Within the Dun there was disorder. Servants were shouting to one another, and women were running to and fro aimlessly, wringing their hands and screaming; and, when they saw the Champion, those nearest to him ran away, and there was a general effort on the part of every person to get behind every other person. But Fionn caught the eye of his butler, Gariv Crona'n, the Rough Buzzer, and held it.

"Come you here," he said.

And the Rough Buzzer came to him without a single buzz in his body.

"Where is the Flower of Allen?" his master demanded.

"I do not know, master," the terrified servant replied.

"You do not know!" said Fionn. "Tell what you do know."

And the man told him this story.

CHAPTER IV

"When you had been away for a day the guards were surprised. They were looking from the heights of the Dun, and the Flower of Allen was with them. She, for she had a quest's eye, called out that the master of the Fianna was coming over the ridges to the Dun, and she ran from the keep to meet you."

"It was not I," said Fionn.

"It bore your shape," replied Gariv Cronan. "It had your armour and your face, and the dogs, Bran and Sceo'lan, were with it."

"They were with me," said Fionn.

"They seemed to be with it," said the servant humbly

"Tell us this tale," cried Fionn.

"We were distrustful," the servant continued. "We had never known Fionn to return from a combat before it had been fought, and we knew you could not have reached Ben Edar or encountered the Lochlannachs. So we urged our lady

to let us go out to meet you, but to remain herself in the Dun."

"It was good urging," Fionn assented.

"She would not be advised," the servant wailed. "She cried to us, 'Let me go to meet my love'."

"Alas!" said Fionn.

"She cried on us, 'Let me go to meet my husband, the father of the child that is not born.'"

"Alas!" groaned deep wounded Fionn. "She ran towards your appearance that had your arms stretched out to her."

At that wise Fionn put his hand before his eyes, seeing all that happened.

"Tell on your tale," said he.

"She ran to those arms, and when she reached them the figure lifted its hand. It touched her with a hazel rod, and, while we looked, she disappeared, and where she had been there was a fawn standing and shivering. The fawn turned and bounded towards the gate of the Dun, but the hounds that were by flew after her."

Fionn stared on him like a lost man.

"They took her by the throat "the shivering servant whispered.

"Ah!" cried Fionn in a terrible voice.

"And they dragged her back to the figure that seemed to be Fionn. Three times she broke away and came bounding to us, and three times the dogs took her by the throat and dragged her back."

"You stood to look!" the Chief snarled.

"No, master, we ran, but she vanished as we got to her; the great hounds vanished away, and that being that seemed to be Fionn disappeared with them. We were left in the rough grass, staring about us and at each other, and listening to the moan of the wind and the terror of our hearts."

"Forgive us, dear master," the servant cried. But the great captain made him no answer. He stood as though he were dumb and blind, and now and again he beat terribly on his breast with his closed fist, as though he would kill that within him which should be dead and could not die. He went

so, beating on his breast, to his inner room in the Dun, and he was not seen again for the rest of that day, nor until the sun rose over Moy Life' in the morning.

CHAPTER V

For many years after that time, when he was not fighting against the enemies of Ireland, Fionn was searching and hunting through the length and breadth of the country in the hope that he might again chance on his lovely lady from the Shi'. Through all that time he slept in misery each night and he rose each day to grief. Whenever he hunted he brought only the hounds that he trusted, Bran and Sceo'lan, Lomaire, Brod, and Lomlu; for if a fawn was chased each of these five great dogs would know if that was a fawn to be killed or one to be protected, and so there was small danger to Saeve and a small hope of finding her.

Once, when seven years had passed in fruitless search, Fionn and the chief nobles of the Fianna were hunting Ben

Gulbain. All the hounds of the Fianna were out, for Fionn had now given up hope of encountering the Flower of Allen. As the hunt swept along the sides of the hill there arose a great outcry of hounds from a narrow place high on the slope and, over all that uproar there came the savage baying of Fionn's own dogs.

"What is this for?" said Fionn, and with his companions he pressed to the spot whence the noise came.

"They are fighting all the hounds of the Fianna," cried a champion.

And they were. The five wise hounds were in a circle and were giving battle to an hundred dogs at once. They were bristling and terrible, and each bite from those great, keen jaws was woe to the beast that received it. Nor did they fight in silence as was their custom and training, but between each onslaught the great heads were uplifted, and they pealed loudly, mournfully, urgently, for their master.

"They are calling on me," he roared.

And with that he ran, as he had only once before run,

and the men who were nigh to him went racing as they would not have run for their lives. They came to the narrow place on the slope of the mountain, and they saw the five great hounds in a circle keeping off the other dogs, and in the middle of the ring a little boy was standing. He had long, beautiful hair, and he was naked. He was not daunted by the terrible combat and clamour of the hounds. He did not look at the hounds, but he stared like a young prince at Fionn and the champions as they rushed towards him scattering the pack with the butts of their spears. When the fight was over, Bran and Sceo'lan ran whining to the little boy and licked his hands.

"They do that to no one," said a bystander. "What new master is this they have found?"

Fionn bent to the boy. "Tell me, my little prince and pulse, what your name is, and how you have come into the middle of a hunting pack, and why you are naked?"

But the boy did not understand the language of the men of Ireland. He put bis hand into Fionn's, and the Chief felt as if that little hand had been put into his heart. He lifted the

lad to his great shoulder.

"We have caught something on this hunt," said he to Caelte mac Rongn. "We must bring this treasure home. You shall be one of the Fianna Finn, my darling," he called upwards.

The boy looked down on him, and in the noble trust and fearlessness of that regard Fionn's heart melted away.

"My little fawn!" he said.

And he remembered that other fawn. He set the boy between his knees and stared at him earnestly and long.

"There is surely the same look," he said to his wakening heart; "that is the very eye of Saeve."

The grief flooded out of his heart as at a stroke, and joy foamed into it in one great tide. He marched back singing to the encampment, and men saw once more the merry Chief they had almost forgotten.

CHAPTER VI

Just as at one time he could not be parted from Saeve, so now he could not be separated from this boy. He had a thousand names for him, each one more tender than the last: "My Fawn, My Pulse, My Secret Little Treasure," or he would call him "My Music, My Blossoming Branch, My Store in the Heart, My Soul." And the dogs were as wild for the boy as Fionn was. He could sit in safety among a pack that would have torn any man to pieces, and the reason was that Bran and Sceo'lan, with their three whelps, followed him about like shadows. When he was with the pack these five were with him, and woeful indeed was the eye they turned on their comrades when these pushed too closely or were not properly humble. They thrashed the pack severally and collectively until every hound in Fionn's kennels knew that the little lad was their master, and that there was nothing in the world so sacred as he was.

In no long time the five wise hounds could have given

over their guardianship, so complete was the recognition of their young lord. But they did not so give over, for it was not love they gave the lad but adoration.

Fionn even may have been embarrassed by their too close attendance. If he had been able to do so he might have spoken harshly to his dogs, but he could not; it was unthinkable that he should; and the boy might have spoken harshly to him if he had dared to do it. For this was the order of Fionn's affection: first there was the boy; next, Bran and Sceo'lan with their three whelps; then Caelte mac Rona'n, and from him down through the champions. He loved them all, but it was along that precedence his affections ran. The thorn that went into Bran's foot ran into Fionn's also. The world knew it, and there was not a champion but admitted sorrowfully that there was reason for his love.

Little by little the boy came to understand their speech and to speak it himself, and at last he was able to tell his story to Fionn.

There were many blanks in the tale, for a young child

does not remember very well. Deeds grow old in a day and are buried in a night. New memories come crowding on old ones, and one must learn to forget as well as to remember. A whole new life had come on this boy, a life that was instant and memorable, so that his present memories blended into and obscured the past, and he could not be quite sure if that which he told of had happened in this world or in the world he had left.

CHAPTER VII

"I used to live," he said, "in a wide, beautiful place. There were hills and valleys there, and woods and streams, but in whatever direction I went I came always to a cliff, so tall it seemed to lean against the sky, and so straight that even a goat would not have imagined to climb it."

"I do not know of any such place," Fionn mused.

"There is no such place in Ireland," said Caelte, "but in the Shi' there is such a place."

"There is in truth," said Fionn.

"I used to eat fruits and roots in the summer," the boy continued, "but in the winter food was left for me in a cave."

"Was there no one with you?" Fionn asked.

"No one but a deer that loved me, and that I loved."

"Ah me!" cried Fionn in anguish, "tell me your tale, my son."

"A dark stern man came often after us, and he used to speak with the deer. Sometimes he talked gently and softly and coaxingly, but at times again he would shout loudly and in a harsh, angry voice. But whatever way he talked the deer would draw away from him in dread, and he always left her at last furiously."

"It is the Dark Magician of the Men of God," cried Fionn despairingly.

"It is indeed, my soul," said Caelte.

"The last time I saw the deer," the child continued, "the dark man was speaking to her. He spoke for a long time. He

spoke gently and angrily, and gently and angrily, so that I thought he would never stop talking, but in the end he struck her with a hazel rod, so that she was forced to follow him when he went away. She was looking back at me all the time and she was crying so bitterly that any one would pity her. I tried to follow her also, but I could not move, and I cried after her too, with rage and grief, until I could see her no more and hear her no more. Then I fell on the grass, my senses went away from me, and when I awoke I was on the hill in the middle of the hounds where you found me."

That was the boy whom the Fianna called Oisi'n, or the Little Fawn. He grew to be a great fighter afterwards, and he was the chief maker of poems in the world. But he was not yet finished with the Shi. He was to go back into Faery when the time came, and to come thence again to tell these tales, for it was by him these tales were told.

THE WOOING OF BECFOLA

CHAPTER I

We do not know where Becfola came from. Nor do we know for certain where she went to. We do not even know her real name, for the name Becfola, "Dowerless" or "Small dowered," was given to her as a nickname. This only is certain, that she disappeared from the world we know of, and that she went to a realm where even conjecture may not follow her.

It happened in the days when Dermod, son of the famous Ae of Slane, was monarch of all Ireland. He was unmarried, but he had many foster sons, princes from the Four Provinces, who were sent by their fathers as tokens of loyalty and affection to the Ard Ri, and his duties as a foster father were righteously acquitted. Among the young princes of his household there was one, Crimthann, son of Ae, King of Leinster, whom the High King preferred to the others over

whom he held fatherly sway. Nor was this wonderful, for the lad loved him also, and was as eager and intelligent and modest as becomes a prince.

The High King and Crimthann would often set out from Tara to hunt and hawk, sometimes unaccompanied even by a servant; and on these excursions the king imparted to his foster son his own wide knowledge of forest craft, and advised him generally as to the bearing and duties of a prince, the conduct of a court, and the care of a people.

Dermod mac Ae delighted in these solitary adventures, and when he could steal a day from policy and affairs he would send word privily to Crimthann. The boy, having donned his hunting gear, would join the king at a place arranged between them, and then they ranged abroad as chance might direct.

On one of these adventures, as they searched a flooded river to find the ford, they saw a solitary woman in a chariot driving from the west.

"I wonder what that means?" the king exclaimed

thoughtfully.

"Why should you wonder at a woman in a chariot?" his companion inquired, for Crimthann loved and would have knowledge.

"Good, my Treasure," Dermod answered, "our minds are astonished when we see a woman able to drive a cow to pasture, for it has always seemed to us that they do not drive well."

Crimthann absorbed instruction like a sponge and digested it as rapidly.

"I think that is justly said," he agreed.

"But," Dermod continued, "when we see a woman driving a chariot of two horses, then we are amazed indeed."

When the machinery of anything is explained to us we grow interested, and Crimthann became, by instruction, as astonished as the king was.

"In good truth," said he, "the woman is driving two horses."

"Had you not observed it before?" his master asked with

kindly malice.

"I had observed but not noticed," the young man admitted.

"Further," said the king, "surmise is aroused in us when we discover a woman far from a house; for you will have both observed and noticed that women are home dwellers, and that a house without a woman or a woman without a house are imperfect objects, and although they be but half observed, they are noticed on the double."

"There is no doubting it," the prince answered from a knitted and thought tormented brow.

"We shall ask this woman for information about herself," said the king decidedly.

"Let us do so," his ward agreed

"The king's majesty uses the words 'we' and 'us' when referring to the king's majesty," said Dermod, "but princes who do not yet rule territories must use another form of speech when referring to themselves."

"I am very thoughtless, said Crimthann humbly.

The king kissed him on both cheeks.

"Indeed, my dear heart and my son, we are not scolding you, but you must try not to look so terribly thoughtful when you think. It is part of the art of a ruler."

"I shall never master that hard art," lamented his fosterling.

"We must all master it," Dermod replied. "We may think with our minds and with our tongues, but we should never think with our noses and with our eyebrows,"

The woman in the chariot had drawn nigh to the ford by which they were standing, and, without pause, she swung her steeds into the shallows and came across the river in a tumult of foam and spray.

"Does she not drive well?" cried Crimthann admiringly.

"When you are older," the king counselled him, "you will admire that which is truly admirable, for although the driving is good the lady is better."

He continued with enthusiasm.

"She is in truth a wonder of the world and an endless

delight to the eye."

She was all that and more, and, as she took the horses through the river and lifted them up the bank, her flying hair and parted lips and all the young strength and grace of her body went into the king's eye and could not easily come out again.

Nevertheless, it was upon his ward that the lady's gaze rested, and if the king could scarcely look away from her, she could, but only with an equal effort, look away from Crimthann.

"Halt there!" cried the king.

"Who should I halt for?" the lady demanded, halting all the same, as is the manner of women, who rebel against command and yet receive it.

"Halt for Dermod!"

"There are Dermods and Dermods in this world," she quoted.

"There is yet but one Ard Ri'," the monarch answered.

She then descended from the chariot and made her

reverence.

"I wish to know your name?" said he.

But at this demand the lady frowned and answered decidedly:

"I do not wish to tell it."

"I wish to know also where you come from and to what place you are going?"

"I do not wish to tell any of these things."

"Not to the king!"

"I do not wish to tell them to any one."

Crimthann was scandalised.

"Lady," he pleaded, "you will surely not withhold information from the Ard Ri?"

But the lady stared as royally on the High King as the High King did on her, and, whatever it was he saw in those lovely eyes, the king did not insist.

He drew Crimthann apart, for he withheld no instruction from that lad.

"My heart," he said, "we must always try to act wisely,

and we should only insist on receiving answers to questions in which we are personally concerned."

Crimthann imbibed all the justice of that remark.

"Thus I do not really require to know this lady's name, nor do I care from what direction she comes."

"You do not?" Crimthann asked.

"No, but what I do wish to know is, Will she marry me?"

"By my hand that is a notable question," his companion stammered.

"It is a question that must be answered," the king cried triumphantly. "But," he continued, "to learn what woman she is, or where she comes from, might bring us torment as well as information. Who knows in what adventures the past has engaged her!"

And he stared for a profound moment on disturbing, sinister horizons, and Crimthann meditated there with him."

"The past is hers," he concluded, "but the future is ours, and we shall only demand that which is pertinent to the

future."

He returned to the lady.

"We wish you to be our wife," he said. And he gazed on her benevolently and firmly and carefully when he said that, so that her regard could not stray otherwhere. Yet, even as he looked, a tear did well into those lovely eyes, and behind her brow a thought moved of the beautiful boy who was looking at her from the king's side.

But when the High King of Ireland asks us to marry him we do not refuse, for it is not a thing that we shall be asked to do every day in the week, and there is no woman in the world but would love to rule it in Tara.

No second tear crept on the lady's lashes, and, with her hand in the king's hand, they paced together towards the palace, while behind them, in melancholy mood, Crimthann mac Ae led the horses and the chariot.

CHAPTER II

They were married in a haste which equalled the king's desire; and as he did not again ask her name, and as she did not volunteer to give it, and as she brought no dowry to her husband and received none from him, she was called Becfola, the Dowerless.

Time passed, and the king's happiness was as great as his expectation of it had promised. But on the part of Becfola no similar tidings can be given.

There are those whose happiness lies in ambition and station, and to such a one the fact of being queen to the High King of Ireland is a satisfaction at which desire is sated. But the mind of Becfola was not of this temperate quality, and, lacking Crimthann, it seemed to her that she possessed nothing.

For to her mind he was the sunlight in the sun, the brightness in the moonbeam; he was the savour in fruit and the taste in honey; and when she looked from Crimthann to

the king she could not but consider that the right man was in the wrong place. She thought that crowned only with his curls Crlmthann mac Ae was more nobly diademed than are the masters of the world, and she told him so.

His terror on hearing this unexpected news was so great that he meditated immediate flight from Tara; but when a thing has been uttered once it is easier said the second time and on the third repetition it is patiently listened to.

After no great delay Crimthann mac Ae agreed and arranged that he and Becfola should fly from Tara, and it was part of their understanding that they should live happily ever after.

One morning, when not even a bird was astir, the king felt that his dear companion was rising. He looked with one eye at the light that stole greyly through the window, and recognised that it could not in justice be called light.

"There is not even a bird up," he murmured.

And then to Becfola.

"What is the early rising for, dear heart?"

"An engagement I have," she replied.

"This is not a time for engagements," said the calm monarch.

"Let it be so," she replied, and she dressed rapidly.

"And what is the engagement?" he pursued.

"Raiment that I left at a certain place and must have. Eight silken smocks embroidered with gold, eight precious brooches of beaten gold, three diadems of pure gold."

"At this hour," said the patient king, "the bed is better than the road."

"Let it be so," said she.

"And moreover," he continued, "a Sunday journey brings bad luck."

"Let the luck come that will come," she answered.

"To keep a cat from cream or a woman from her gear is not work for a king," said the monarch severely.

The Ard Ri' could look on all things with composure, and regard all beings with a tranquil eye; but it should be known that there was one deed entirely hateful to him, and he

would punish its commission with the very last rigour this was, a transgression of the Sunday. During six days of the week all that could happen might happen, so far as Dermod was concerned, but on the seventh day nothing should happen at all if the High King could restrain it. Had it been possible he would have tethered the birds to their own green branches on that day, and forbidden the clouds to pack the upper world with stir and colour. These the king permitted, with a tight lip, perhaps, but all else that came under his hand felt his control.

It was hls custom when he arose on the morn of Sunday to climb to the most elevated point of Tara, and gaze thence on every side, so that he might see if any fairies or people of the Shi' were disporting themselves in his lordship; for he absolutely prohibited the usage of the earth to these beings on the Sunday, and woe's worth was it for the sweet being he discovered breaking his law.

We do not know what ill he could do to the fairies, but during Dermod's reign the world said its prayers on Sunday

and the Shi' folk stayed in their hills.

It may be imagined, therefore, with what wrath he saw his wife's preparations for her journey, but, although a king can do everything, what can a husband do . . .? He rearranged himself for slumber.

"I am no party to this untimely journey," he said angrily.

"Let it be so," said Becfola.

She left the palace with one maid, and as she crossed the doorway something happened to her, but by what means it happened would be hard to tell; for in the one pace she passed out of the palace and out of the world, and the second step she trod was in Faery, but she did not know this.

Her intention was to go to Cluain da chaillech to meet Crimthann, but when she left the palace she did not remember Crimthann any more.

To her eye and to the eye of her maid the world was as it always had been, and the landmarks they knew were about them. But the object for which they were travelling was

different, although unknown, and the people they passed on the roads were unknown, and were yet people that they knew.

They set out southwards from Tara into the Duffry of Leinster, and after some time they came into wild country and went astray. At last Becfola halted, saying:

"I do not know where we are."

The maid replied that she also did not know.

"Yet," said Becfola, "if we continue to walk straight on we shall arrive somewhere."

They went on, and the maid watered the road with her tears.

Night drew on them; a grey chill, a grey silence, and they were enveloped in that chill and silence; and they began to go in expectation and terror, for they both knew and did not know that which they were bound for.

As they toiled desolately up the rustling and whispering side of a low hill the maid chanced to look back, and when she looked back she screamed and pointed, and clung to

Becfola’s arm. Becfola followed the pointing finger, and saw below a large black mass that moved jerkily forward.

"Wolves!" cried the maid. "Run to the trees yonder," her mistress ordered. "We will climb them and sit among the branches."

They ran then, the maid moaning and lamenting all the while.

"I cannot climb a tree," she sobbed, "I shall be eaten by the wolves."

And that was true.

But her mistress climbed a tree, and drew by a hand’s breadth from the rap and snap and slaver of those steel jaws. Then, sitting on a branch, she looked with angry woe at the straining and snarling horde below, seeing many a white fang in those grinning jowls, and the smouldering, red blink of those leaping and prowling eyes.

CHAPTER III

But after some time the moon arose and the wolves went away, for their leader, a sagacious and crafty chief, declared that as long as they remained where they were, the lady would remain where she was; and so, with a hearty curse on trees, the troop departed. Becfola had pains in her legs from the way she had wrapped them about the branch, but there was no part of her that did not ache, for a lady does not sit with any ease upon a tree.

For some time she did not care to come down from the branch. "Those wolves may return," she said, "for their chief is crafty and sagacious, and it is certain, from the look I caught in his eye as he departed, that he would rather taste of me than cat any woman he has met."

She looked carefully in every direction to see if ane might discover them in hiding; she looked closely and lingeringly at the shadows under distant trees to see if these shadows moved; and she listened on every wind to try if she

could distinguish a yap or a yawn or a sneeze. But she saw or heard nothing; and little by little tranquillity crept into her mind, and she began to consider that a danger which is past is a danger that may be neglected.

Yet ere she descended she looked again on the world of jet and silver that dozed about her, and she spied a red glimmer among distant trees.

"There is no danger where there is light," she said, and she thereupon came from the tree and ran in the direction that she had noted.

In a spot between three great oaks she came upon a man who was roasting a wild boar over a fire. She saluted this youth and sat beside him. But after the first glance and greeting he did not look at her again, nor did he speak.

When the boar was cooked he ate of it and she had her share. Then he arose from the fire and walked away among the trees. Becfola followed, feeling ruefully that something new to her experience had arrived; "for," she thought, "it is usual that young men should not speak to me now that I am

the mate of a king, but it is very unusual that young men should not look at me."

But if the young man did not look at her she looked well at him, and what she saw pleased her so much that she had no time for further cogitation. For if Crimthann had been beautiful, this youth was ten times more beautiful. The curls on Crimthann's head had been indeed as a benediction to the queen's eye, so that she had eaten the better and slept the sounder for seeing him. But the sight of this youth left her without the desire to eat, and, as for sleep, she dreaded it, for if she closed an eye she would be robbed of the one delight in time, which was to look at this young man, and not to cease looking at him while her eye could peer or her head could remain upright.

They came to an inlet of the sea all sweet and calm under the round, silver flooding moon, and the young man, with Becfola treading on his heel, stepped into a boat and rowed to a high jutting, pleasant island. There they went inland towards a vast palace, in which there was no person

but themselves alone, and there the young man went to sleep, while Becfola sat staring at him until the unavoidable peace pressed down her eyelids and she too slumbered.

She was awakened in the morning by a great shout.

"Come out, Flann, come out, my heart!"

The young man leaped from his couch, girded on his harness, and strode out. Three young men met him, each in battle harness, and these four advanced to meet four other men who awaited them at a little distance on the lawn. Then these two sets of four fought togethor with every warlike courtesy but with every warlike severity, and at the end of that combat there was but one man standing, and the other seven lay tossed in death.

Becfola spoke to the youth.

"Your combat has indeed been gallant," she said.

"Alas," he replied, "if it has been a gallant deed it has not been a good one, for my three brothers are dead and my four nephews are dead."

"Ah me!" cried Becfola, "why did you fight that fight?"

"For the lordship of this island, the Isle of Fedach, son of Dali."

But, although Becfola was moved and horrified by this battle, it was in another direction that her interest lay; therefore she soon asked the question which lay next her heart:

"Why would you not speak to me or look at me?"

"Until I have won the kingship of this land from all claimants, I am no match for the mate of the High King of Ireland," he replied.

And that reply was llke balm to the heart of Becfola.

"What shall I do?" she inquired radiantly. "Return to your home," he counselled. "I will escort you there with your maid, for she is not really dead, and when I have won my lordship I will go seek you in Tara."

"You will surely come," she insisted.

"By my hand," quoth he, "I will come."

These three returned then, and at the end of a day and night they saw far off the mighty roofs of Tara massed in the

morning haze. The young man left them, and with many a backward look and with dragging, reluctant feet, Becfola crossed the threshold of the palace, wondering what she should say to Dermod and how she could account for an absence of three days' duration.

CHAPTER IV

IT was so early that not even a bird was yet awake, and the dull grey light that came from the atmosphere enlarged and made indistinct all that one looked at, and swathed all things in a cold and livid gloom.

As she trod cautiously through dim corridors Becfola was glad that, saving the guards, no creature was astir, and that for some time yet she need account to no person for her movements. She was glad also of a respite which would enable her to settle into her home and draw about her the composure which women feel when they are surrounded by the walls of their houses, and can see about them the

possessions which, by the fact of ownership, have become almost a part of their personality. Sundered from her belongings, no woman is tranquil, her heart is not truly at ease, however her mind may function, so that under the broad sky or in the house of another she is not the competent, precise individual which she becomes when she sees again her household in order and her domestic requirements at her hand.

Becfola pushed the door of the king’s sleeping chamber and entered noiselessly. Then she sat quietly in a seat gazing on the recumbent monarch, and prepared to consider how she should advance to him when he awakened, and with what information she might stay his inquiries or reproaches.

"I will reproach him," she thought. "I will call him a bad husband and astonish him, and he will forget everything but his own alarm and indignation."

But at that moment the king lifted his head from the pillow and looked kindly at her. Her heart gave a great throb, and she prepared to speak at once and in great volume before

he could formulate any question. But the king spoke first, and what he said so astonished her that the explanation and reproach with which her tongue was thrilling fled from it at a stroke, and she could only sit staring and bewildered and tongue tied.

"Well, my dear heart," said the king, "have you decided not to keep that engagement?"

"I I !" Becfola stammered.

"It is truly not an hour for engagements," Dermod insisted, "for not a bird of the birds has left his tree; and," he continued maliciously, "the light is such that you could not see an engagement even if you met one."

"I," Becfola gasped. "I !"

"A Sunday journey," he went on, "is a notorious bad journey. No good can come from it. You can get your smocks and diadems to morrow. But at this hour a wise person leaves engagements to the bats and the staring owls and the round eyed creatures that prowl and sniff in the dark. Come back to the warm bed, sweet woman, and set on your journey in the

morning."

Such a load of apprehension was lifted from Becfola's heart that she instantly did as she had been commanded, and such a bewilderment had yet possession of her faculties that she could not think or utter a word on any subject.

Yet the thought did come into her head as she stretched in the warm gloom that Crimthann the son of Ae must be now attending her at Cluain da chaillech, and she thought of that young man as of something wonderful and very ridiculous, and the fact that he was waiting for her troubled her no more than if a sheep had been waiting for her or a roadside bush.

She fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

In the morning as they sat at breakfast four clerics were announced, and when they entered the king looked on them with stern disapproval.

"What is the meaning of this journey on Sunday?" he demanded.

A lank jawed, thin browed brother, with uneasy, intertwining fingers, and a deep set, venomous eye, was the spokesman of those four.

"Indeed," he said, and the fingers of his right hand strangled and did to death the fingers of his left hand, "indeed, we have transgressed by order."

"Explain that."

"We have been sent to you hurriedly by our master, Molasius of Devenish."

"A pious, a saintly man," the king interrupted, "and one who does not countenance transgressions of the Sunday."

"We were ordered to tell you as follows," said the grim

cleric, and he buried the fingers of his right hand in his left fist, so that one could not hope to see them resurrected again. "It was the duty of one of the Brothers of Devenish," he continued, "to turn out the cattle this morning before the dawn of day, and that Brother, while in his duty, saw eight comely young men who fought together."

"On the morning of Sunday," Dermod exploded.

The cleric nodded with savage emphasis.

"On the morning of this self same and instant sacred day."

"Tell on," said the king wrathfully.

But terror gripped with sudden fingers at Becfola's heart.

"Do not tell horrid stories on the Sunday," she pleaded. "No good can come to any one from such a tale."

"Nay, this must be told, sweet lady," said the king. But the cleric stared at her glumly, forbiddingly, and resumed his story at a gesture.

"Of these eight men, seven were killed."

"They are in hell," the king said gloomily.

"In hell they are," the cleric replied with enthusiasm.

"And the one that was not killed?"

"He is alive," that cleric responded.

"He would be," the monarch assented. "Tell your tale."

"Molasius had those seven miscreants buried, and he took from their unhallowed necks and from their lewd arms and from their unblessed weapons the load of two men in gold and silver treasure."

"Two men's load!" said Dermod thoughtfully.

"That much," said the lean cleric. "No more, no less. And he has sent us to find out what part of that hellish treasure belongs to the Brothers of Devenish and how much is the property of the king."

Becfola again broke in, speaking graciously, regally, hastily: "Let those Brothers have the entire of the treasure, for it is Sunday treasure, and as such it will bring no luck to any one."

The cleric again looked at her coldly, with a harsh

lidded, small set, grey eyed glare, and waited for the king’s reply.

Dermod pondered, shaking his head as to an argument on his left side, and then nodding it again as to an argument on his right.

"It shall be done as this sweet queen advises. Let a reliquary be formed with cunning workmanship of that gold and silver, dated with my date and signed with my name, to be in memory of my grandmother who gave birth to a lamb, to a salmon, and then to my father, the Ard Ri’. And, as to the treasure that remains over, a pastoral staff may be beaten from it in honour of Molasius, the pious man."

"The story is not ended," said that glum, spike chinned cleric.

The king moved with jovial impatience.

"If you continue it," he said, "it will surely come to an end some time. A stone on a stone makes a house, dear heart, and a word on a word tells a tale."

The cleric wrapped himself into himself, and became

lean and menacing. He whispered: "Besides the young man, named Flann, who was not slain, there was another person present at the scene and the combat and the transgression of Sunday."

"Who was that person?" said the alarmed monarch.

The cleric spiked forward his chin, and then butted forward his brow.

"It was the wife of the king," he shouted. "It was the woman called Becfola. It was that woman," he roared, and he extended a lean, inflexible, unending first finger at the queen.

"Dog!" the king stammered, starting up.

"If that be in truth a woman," the cleric screamed.

"What do you mean?" the king demanded in wrath and terror.

"Either she is a woman of this world to he punished, or she is a woman of the Shi' to be banished, but this holy morning she was in the Shi', and her arms were about the neck of Flann."

The king sank back in his chair stupefied, gazing from one to the other, and then turned an unseeing, fear dimmed eye towards Becfola.

"Is this true, my pulse?" he murmured.

"It is true," Becfola replied, and she became suddenly to the king's eye a whiteness and a stare. He pointed to the door.

"Go to your engagement," he stammered. "Go to that Flann."

"He is waiting for me," said Becfola with proud shame, "and the thought that he should wait wrings my heart."

She went out from the palace then. She went away from Tara: and in all Ireland and in the world of living men she was not seen again, and she was never heard of again.