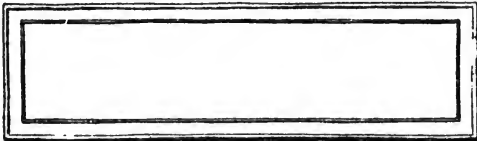
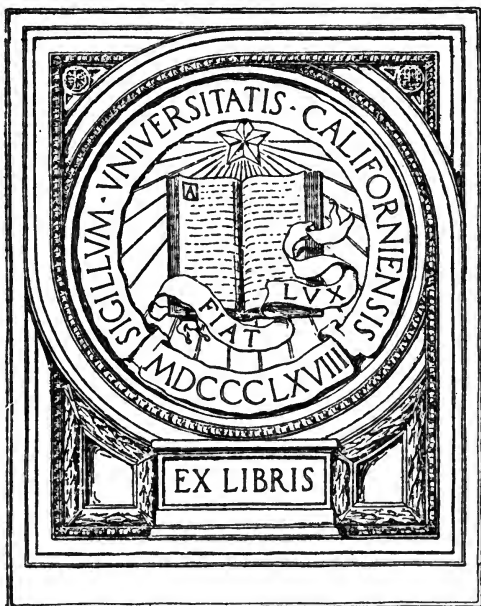


THE SONS O' COMMAC
AN' TALES OF OTHER
MEN'S SONS

ALDIS DUNBAR

GIFT OF
Ella Sterling Mighels



THE
SONS O' CORMAC

AN' TALES OF OTHER
MEN'S SONS

OF
CALIFORNIA

BY

ALDIS DUNBAR

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WITH 8 ILLUSTRATIONS BY MYRA LUXMOORE

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Ella Sterling Mighel

TO
THE LADS O' ME HEART

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Sure, day in an' day out, 'tis beatin' me poor weary brains I am ; for no sooner am I afther hearin' the pattherin' o' feet comin' toward me than 'tis up an' hide, or tell a tale o' heroes in times past. When an' ever the day 'll come for them to tire is more nor mortal man, let alone one workin' in this garden, can be afther gues-sin'. 'Twill be a restful day, that, when the masther packs the whole armful o' them off to school.

Whist, now ! What's that ? Ah-h, now, the swate voices o' them laughin' among the bushes. Sure, 'tis meself is caught entirely.

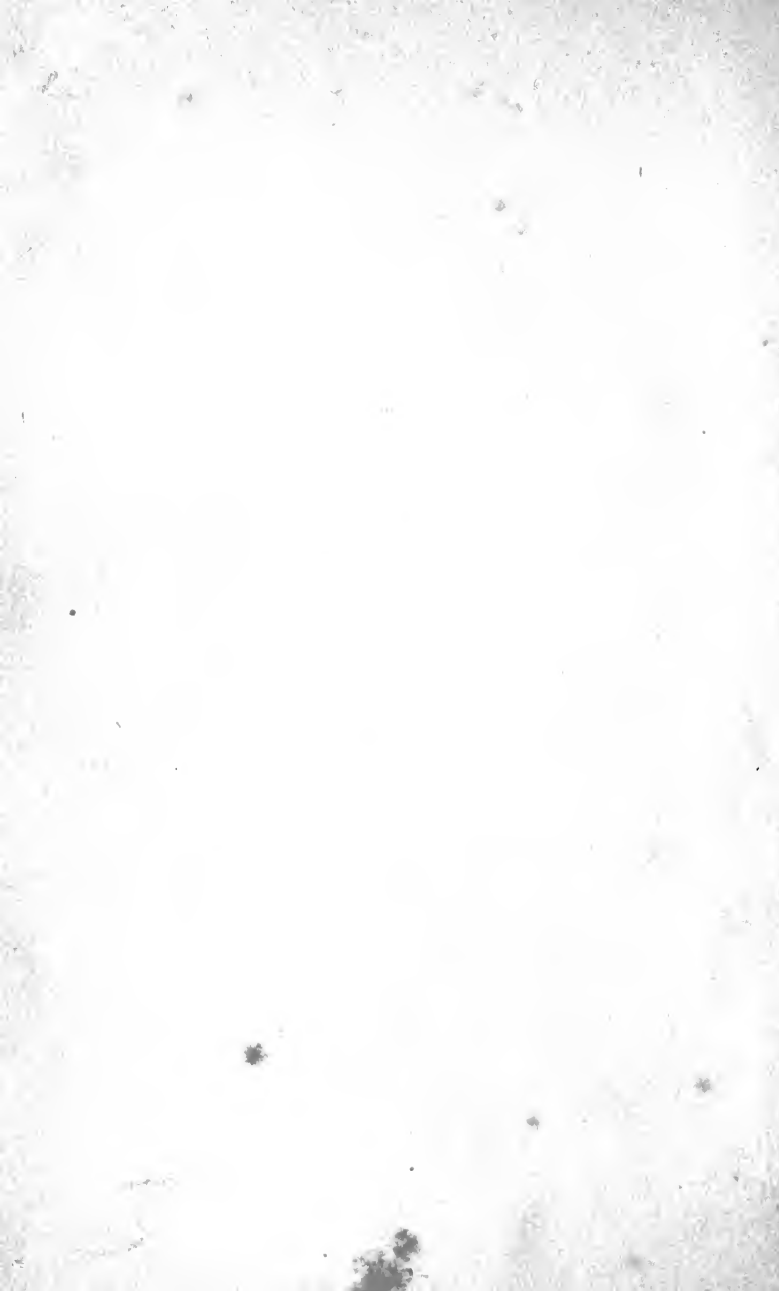


I

THE CONSTANT GREEN JERKIN

A

200



THE SONS O' CORMAC



THE SONS O' CORMAC

I

THE CONSTANT GREEN JERKIN

["A story is it? An' the grass a-perishin' for the want o' watherin' this very evenin'! Well, have yer will, an' tell the masher yerselves what was after hindherin' me from me work."]

'Twas back o' the years, in the days when the Little People were a power in the land, an' there was fightin' a plenty with the Danes an' their like—that Cormac without a Kingdom lived by the Lough o' the Eagle with his three sons.

Now these were Dermond o' the Bow, an' Eiveen the Swift—an' the youngest of all, that was Conan o' the Long Arms; an' some called this last Conan the Singer,

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for he had skill in singin' more than any man on the shores o' Moyle, an' the birds came an' sat on the trees to listen when he played the harp.

I tell ye, Dermond o' the Bow was great at the huntin', an' could send his long arrows across the Lough o' the Eagle, an' strike the wild ducks that swam in the reeds; but Cormac his father, that had lost his kingdom by raison o' the Danes, could sit at the door o' his cabin an' bring down the sparrow-hawk that flew across the fir trees. An' the fir trees grew where the reeds ended.

An' Eiveen the Swift could run beyant the deer in the forest, an' turn them toward his brother, in the chase; but King Cormac, for all his white hair, was swifter still, an' could keep abreast o' the wind as it blew over the green grass, an' sent the little waves to break on the shores o' the Lough.

An' Conan stayed by the cabin, an' brought in wood for the fire, an' roasted

the meat when his brothers came home weary from the hills. But when they were off in the early mornin', an' King Cormac sleepin' before the fire on his bed o' rushes, Conan would sit by the door with his harp, an' sing till the fishes poked their heads out o' the Lough to hear—an' even the old king himself could do nothin' greater nor that.

So time went past, an' King Cormac gave up livin' because o' being so old; an' there was nothing for him to leave to his three sons beyant his blessin' an' the shabby old green jerkin that he wore.

“'Tis the chiefest treasure I have,” says he, “an' I give it yees with me blessin'. Let none scorn it, or 'twill shame him in the end.” An' with that he died, an' they buried him on the shore o' the Lough, with a great pile o' stones to mark the spot.

So when the night came, Dermond an' Eiveen lay by the fire; but Conan the Singer sat in the moonlight, playin' an' singin' to break the very hearts o' those

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that heard; an' even his two brothers were a-sorrowin', for all they were stout an' fierce.

An' says Dermond o' the Bow: "Give me the green jerkin; for 'tis I am the oldest, an' should wear it for a sign o' mournin' for King Cormac our father."

An' Eiveen the Swift brought it from the corner where it was hangin', an' slipped it on his brother's arms. But Conan kept on playin' in the moonlight, an' lookin' down the path o' the stars in the waters o' the Lough.

An' as he sat there, there came a great noise o' folk ridin' down the mountain side, rattlin' the stones under the feet o' the horses an' jinglin' their spurs, an' callin' one to the other. An' at the head o' the line rode two together.

One was a little, shrivelled old man, with eyes that burned like coals o' fire in his face; an' his hair was thin an' grey; an' while he was no giant like King Cormac, yet he wore rich armour, an' a crown on his head. An' beside him, on a white horse,

came the fairest girl that had been seen in that place for many a day. Her dress was o' the green silk, with a mantle o' scarlet hangin' from her shoulders; an' her hair was shinin' yellow, so that one could scarce see the band o' wrought gold in it, tellin' her for a real king's daughter. An' behind came servants on horse an' afoot, dressed in bright cloth.

The moon was shinin' till 'twas light as day, an' they rode up to where Conan was singin', an' sat on their horses lookin' at him. Then his brothers, hearin' the noise, came to the door an' stared out; but Conan sang on, never carin' for naught but the pile o' stones by the shore.

Then the old man, that was a king, spoke to Dermond o' the Bow.

"Is it here that is the dwellin' o' Cormac without a Kingdom?"

"Ay," says Dermond. "Yestermorn it was that same; but this night he lies beneath the cairn o' stones that is on the edge o' the Lough."

"Then is a sthrong man passed," answered the old man. "An' we may turn back as we came."

"An' who may ye be?" asked Eiveen the Swift, pushin' forward.

"King Murdough am I, an' this is me daughter Maurya, whom I would give to the champion who shall help me against the Danes. An' Cormac was the sthrongest man of his hands in all the land, though his hair was white. For that would I have given him me daughter, an' he should have ruled me kingdom for me. Then would naught have hindered me from spendin' me days in search of deep learnin'."

An' the princess nodded as he spoke, but her eyes were on Conan.

"Try me," says Dermond, throwin' back his black hair, to look more closely at the princess.

Says King Murdough: "But 'tis not alone a sthrong man I must have. 'Tis the *sthrongest*—an' one with wisdom in his heart to rule men."

“Try me,” says Dermond again, “for I am the first-born son o’ King Cormac, an’ none can stand up against me an’ live to tell of it.”

When King Murdough looked at him, an’ saw what a fine sthrong fellow he was, afther a bit it seemed to him that this might prove a champion to his mind; so he called a servant to bring forward a horse.

“Come to me court for three days,” says he. “An’ if ye stand trial o’ strength with the best o’ me men, an’ do as ye boast—then shall ye be me son, an’ rule for me.”

Then Dermond mounted the horse an’ rode off up the mountain with King Murdough—an’ the princess beside him, with the golden hair that made light shine in the air as she turned to look back at Conan, where he sat playin’ his sorrowin’ for his father.

Now afther Dermond o’ the Bow rode across the mountains to where King Murdough held court, he had a fine room given him, an’ all the walls were covered with

silver cloth ; an' two servin' men went after him wherever he walked, to carry his bow an' arrows. An' the princess sent him a sword an' shield.

So the first thing in the mornin', King Murdough called him out in the courtyard, an' bid him show how far he could shoot. An' Dermond shot across the castle, an' killed a pigeon that perched on the wall beyant. An' 'twas himself was more surprised than any, for never before had he done that well.

“You have shot eastward ; now try to the west,” says the princess.

So he looked where the forest was, to the west—an' never had he seen so clear—an' there was somethin' stirrin' among the bushes. Dermond bent his bow an' took aim, an' the arrow flew over wall an' stream—an' a deer leaped up in the air, an' fell dead in the open.

King Murdough nodded his head when he saw that, for he was thinkin' that this was sure the man he needed ; an' he led him

in, an' made a great feast for him. But the servants o' the princess stood aside, an' laughed at his old ragged shoes, an' at the faded green jerkin that was nigh on too small for his shoulders.

"'Tis a scarecrow, an' no prince at all," says one.

"Put him up on the castle wall, an' he'll fright the Danes as he is," says another.

Now Dermond was a proud man o' his birth, an' he pretended not to hear them, thinkin' o' the fine things he would have when he wed the princess. So the first day went over without more trouble.

Then on the second day came the best fighters o' King Murdough's men, an' Dermond had never been so sthrong in fightin' as he was then. Down went every man he put hand on, an' none could stand up afther.

That night there was another feast; an' more nor before the maids that served Princess Maurya passed behind his chair an' laughed to each other at his poor dress. An' sleepin' that night, an' wakin' in the

mornin', he was hot with anger at them. He took the sword that the princess had given him, an' cut a great piece o' the silver cloth from the wall o' the room an' made himself a cloak of it.

"There's none 'll dare to spake of it to-morrow, when I've married the king's daughter," says he, an' he threw the old green jerkin back o' the door.

When he came to the field where he was to show his strength, there was no man willin' to match with him. Then King Murdough gave word to blow the horn on the castle wall, tellin' all who heard that here was a great champion, an' that who wanted could try fightin' with him.

At last Eocha, a great, stout man, that was chief cook for the king's table, put his head out o' the door.

"Fight will I," says he. "Greasy apron against silver doublet, an' see which wins."

Dermond looked at him scornful like, for he was sure o' whippin' him, an' he stepped up bravely. An' there before he knew it,

sure 'twas Dermond o' the Bow was lyin' on the stones o' the courtyard, beaten fair an' square, under the very eyes o' the princess.

An' then others took heart an' came up to fight, while poor Dermond had no heart to battle with more o' them, an' no understandin' how all this had come about.

"Fine feathers make the peacock," laughed the girls. "Where now is yer green jerkin, Dermond the Champion?"

So, all sudden like, it came to him what his father had said, an' he rushed off to the room where he'd slept, lookin' for the jerkin; but no sign of it was to be seen near nor far. An' in the doorway stood the princess, smilin' at him.

"What has gone wrong?" she asked.

"Lady Maurya," says Dermond, "me jerkin is gone, an' me power with it. Let me go from here, for I'm disgraced."

"An' have ye no strength o' yer own, lackin' it?" asked she.

"Ay," he answered, "but not more nor other men."

"Then here is a purse o' gold, Dermond o' the Bow, that ye may go off to some far kingdom, where ye can win another for yer wife. But I am not for ye."

An' he crept out by the low door at the back o' the castle, an' went off over the hills to seek his fortune, an' came back no more.

Now while these things were doin' in King Murdough's castle, Eiveen the Swift an' Conan his brother were livin' quietly by the Lough o' the Eagle. Each mornin' Conan took his harp to the edge o' the water an' played a lament for Cormac. An' when the third mornin' came, there on the cairn was somethin' strange. Conan went to see, an' 'twas none other than the green jerkin.

He called out loud to Eiveen, who came runnin'. "What is it?" says he.

"The green jerkin has come back without Dermond in it," says Conan.

"More like that he has been here an' left it for us while we were sleepin'," says Eiveen.

“Then ’twill bring him no luck,” says Conan. “Did not Cormac our father say that whoever scorned it would be shamed by it in the end?”

“I will wear it for thought o’ him,” answered Eiveen. “An’ ’tis in me mind to go to the court an’ visit Dermond an’ his princess.”

With no more words, off went Eiveen, like the wind. Never had he run so swiftly, an’ without wearyin’, though the way was up hill an’ over rocks. An’ when he came to the castle he gave a great rap at the gate.

“Who stands knockin’?” called out the guard.

“Eiveen the Swift, brother to Dermond o’ the Bow. Let me come in.”

Well, the guard ran to Princess Maurya, with word that the brother o’ Dermond was at the gate, clad in the same old green jerkin.

“Send him to me,” says the princess; an’ she watched the door close as she heard his feet comin’ near. But when she saw

him, she leaned back in her chair to hear what he should say. An' Eiveen the Swift looked at her with cold eyes, an' thought how well he would like to be in his brother's shoes.

"Where is Dermond o' the Bow?" he asked.

"Gone to seek his fortune in other lands," says Princess Maurya.

"An' have ye a champion betther nor him?" says Eiveen.

"Nay," says she. "He was thrown to the ground by Eocha, who is the cook. I will have no cook for a champion, but a right king's son, even though he be poor."

"Then will I try me fortune," says Eiveen.

An' with him it went as it had with Dermond. The first day he threw down each man that came against him; an' first of all was fat Eocha the cook sent sprawlin' among the stones.

But when the maids saw Eiveen they laughed again.

“A pretty set o’ champions come for our princess, with their old green coats; when she wears nothin’ poorer nor silk an’ stuff o’ gold.”

Eiveen says never a word, thinkin’ how he would turn them all away into the cold when he was married to Princess Maurya.

An’ the second day he shot an arrow across the castle wall, an’ killed a hawk that was carryin’ off a chicken from beyant the river. An’ again he cut a lock o’ hair from the head o’ Cleena, daughter o’ Feargus the Black, as she bent to draw wather at the ford.

But naught held back the girls from castin’ looks at his old coat, in the hall, an’ saying to each other—pretendin’ to be whisperin’—to see how well King Cormac had done for his sons.

Then Eiveen grew hot with rage, an’ went off to his bed. An’ all night he tossed about, thinkin’ o’ the gay silken an’ velvet clothes that the other men wore as though they were naught worth speakin’ of. An’

when it began to grow light, he rose from his bed an' tore down a piece o' gold cloth that hung in the doorway, an' made a doublet to wear.

"Sure," thought he, "it'll all be mine by to-morrow. 'Tis but borrowin' me own." An' the jerkin he left lyin' by the window.

Then afther a bit he came runnin' back for it—for the fine gold doublet was all split up from his bein' thrown by King Murdough's groom. But the jerkin was not where he had left it.

"An' are ye beaten, too?" asked Princess Maurya.

"That am I—an' a worse fate befall Kevin the groom for trippin' me on the pavement," answered Eiveen. So she turned away, an' sent him a purse o' money by the hands o' Maive the Fair—one o' the maids that had laughed at him in the hall. But in Maive's heart rose sorrowin' for Eiveen's ill fortune, an' when she opened the gate to let him pass out, she gave him her hand an' followed him, an' together

they went out into the world to win fortune.

Then it so happened that a second time Conan the Singer rose in early mornin' an' found the old jerkin lyin' on the grave o' Cormac.

"Scorn has come again," thought he. "Now 'tis me turn to wear it for love o' him who lies by the shore. An' it shall go hard with one who takes it from me."

Then he took his harp on his arm, an' went away up the mountain pass, where the eagle was callin' to its young.

At last he came to the castle, an' sat down by the gate, an' struck his harp, till all the men an' maids ran to see who was there. An' even the Princess Maurya stepped down from her great chair, an' went to the courtyard.

When she saw Conan, her eyes laughed with joy, an' she bade him enter, an' herself led him to King Murdough.

"Here is a champion again," says she.

"Nay," says Conan, "I came to search for me brothers."

"They have gone to far countries," answered the princess, "to find fortune. Will ye try yer own? Have ye a mind for fightin', an' for bein' me father's champion?"

"That have I, though it has never come to me to fight with men," says Conan; an' he bent down low an' kissed her hand.

Then King Murdough gave him lodgin' for the night; an'—by order o' the princess—'twas a small bare room. An' in the mornin' Conan came into the courtyard, an' looked at all the men who were there waitin' to fight with him.

"An' did Dermond meet these?" he asked o' the king.

"That he did," answered King Murdough, "an' gained the masthery for a day."

"Then will I do as well as he," says Conan.

So Princess Maurya brought out a sword an' a shield, an' stood on the broad top o' the castle wall to see the fightin'; an' Conan beat all the warriors back, like a brave lad.

Then, when King Murdough made the

feast, Conan sat beside the princess in his old jerkin, that had taken many a cut that day; an' afther a while he chanced to look up an' see that the maids were makin' jest o' him.

"Why are ye laughin', me girls?" he asked; an' the princess waited to see what would come of it this time.

"Because of the ragged coat ye wear," says Cleena. "Have the sons o' Cormac but one jerkin between them?"

"Let none scorn it," says Conan, "or 'twill shame him in the end. For a token o' mournin' an' for love o' Cormac do I wear it; an' I fear to meet no man because of it, though he be dressed in silks an' satin." An' he turned to Princess Maurya, an' thought no more o' their foolish words. An' all night he dreamed o' her golden hair, until the room shone with the rememberin' of it.

In the mornin' he was ready for another trial; an' when they brought him the bow, he bent it bravely, an' sent his first arrow

whirrin' through the open window of a cabin that stood beyond the ford, an' clipped out a candle that burned on the shelf within. An' for his second shot, he slew two great hawks that flew above the castle wall, an' together they fell into the river.

So that trial was passed, an' Conan went into the great hall, an' sat at the feet o' the princess, an' played an' sang until all the noise o' the court ceased for love o' his song.

Yet in the evenin', at the feastin', the king's men spoke scornin' words o' his torn jerkin.

"Will ye go against the Danes in it?" asked Feargus the Black. "Then may they see that ye are but a poor man's son, an' no prince."

"To-morrow shall ye take that word back," says Conan o' the Long Arms, "for no man shall make a jest o' Cormac the King while me arms have strength."

An' all through the night Conan dreamed o' the blue eyes o' Princess Maurya.

When the mornin' came, Feargus stood waitin' in the yard for Conan to come to him; and Princess Maurya watched to see what should befall. Then Conan came from his bed, an' on his back was the green jerkin, an' in his hand the sword o' the princess.

An' there was no chance at all for Feargus the Black, though he was the best man in the court o' the king. Sure, his sword went flyin' through the air, an' fell outside the wall.

When they saw that, there was no one left to risk fightin' with Conan, an' the king led him into the great hall with his own hands.

"Now will ye have Oona o' the White Hands to be yer wife; an' room to live here in me castle, with ten pieces o' gold for every day, and silk to wear; or will ye live in a cabin outside the wall, and wear yer old jerkin, like a poor kerne?"

"Outside the wall is for me, if Princess Maurya will be there too," answered Conan. "But me jerkin will I wear, an' none but her will I wed."

"Nay, if ye take her, together may yees wander into the world, for I give no gold with her."

"Then out into the world we go," says Conan blithely, holdin' out his hand to her, an' she put hers into it with gladness.

"An' call ye that wisdom?" says King Murdough. "Would ye rule men afther that fashion?"

"Who should rule men but him that rules his own?" says Conan. An' the princess says "Ay."

"Then have ye won yer rulin' fairly," says King Murdough, "an' shall have her an' the kingdom. An' as for the jerkin, 'tis yer robe of honour at this court; an' who says aught ill of it, to him shame shall come."

So King Murdough made great rejoicin's, an' gave his daughter to Conan, callin' him Conan o' the Kingdom, for a sign that he was the greatest man in it.

An' so far went the fear o' his name that neither Dane nor any other enemy dared set foot in the land for many a day, lest they

might catch sight o' the green jerkin which gave power to the long arms o' Conan.

[“But why did the princess put Conan in the little bare room?” “Ah, when we guess why she did that, we'll know all o' the tale that's untold. An' now be off with yees, till I wather me green grass.”]



II

THE HARVESTIN' O' DERMOND

II

THE HARVESTIN' O' DERMOND,

[“ No, I’ve naught to tell yees the day, so out o’ the barn with yees. Here’s all the harness to be rubbed bright before the mather goes out dhrivin’. What? ’Tis rainin’? An’ yees can’t be afther takin’ yer walk? Ay! ay! Well, sit ye all down beyant in the corner there, an’ I’ll be thinkin’ about it.”]

YE’LL be mindin’ how Dermond—him that they called Dermond o’ the Bow—afther Princess Maurya gave him the purse o’ gold, slipped out o’ the little low door at the back o’ King Murdough’s castle, an’ was off without no more words to no one? Sure, he was mighty shamed to have been tumbled over by a fat cook, like a bag o’ fresh ground meal on the floor o’ the mill. So he turned

toward the hills, an' walked on for many a mile, not lookin' to right nor to left, nor even mindin' that he was still wearin' the cloak o' silver cloth that had brought him disaster.

'Twas early mornin' when he left the little small door behind him; but 'twas nigh on night, an' the shadows runnin' long down the hillside, when he first thought on where his feet might be afther takin' him. He'd little heart whatever to be goin' back to the Lough o' the Eagle, where his two brothers were livin', to be lettin' on to them that he was beaten.

"Nay," says he, "'tis far better to be heedin' Lady Maurya's words. There's many kingdoms in the land where a stout-hearted warrior 'll find fightin' to his hand, an' that's where I'll win me a princess fairly for me wife."

An' that was brave talkin', for Dermond had neither sword nor shield to his side, but just his long bow an' a little sharp knife for cuttin' up meat.

Now the wind was beginnin' to rise at his back, an' it came sweepin' up the mountain side, an' he had to stand an' meet it a bit, to keep on his feet at all. An' all in a breath his gay silver cloak was caught by the gale an' torn away from him, an' it went whirlin' in the wind down the way he'd been comin', where 'twas darkenin' with heavy clouds.

Then he looked ahead, up the Path o' the Rocks that he was climbin', an' at the top of it, where the way turned down to the valley beyant, he saw the red light o' the setting sun.

"Betther to push on than to turn back without reachin' the top, an' all for the sake o' that cloak o' bad fortune," thought Dermond. "Silver for sorrow, an' I've learned that lesson to me cost."

So up he went, an' the light kep' growin' brighter, until when he stood at the top o' the hill, he could scarce see the valley before him for the shinin' o' the sky.

'Twas a broad valley, that, for all the way

into it was so narrow ; an' 'twas sthrañge to him, bein' no place that he had ever crossed in his huntin'. All around it were steep hills, with sides that no man could climb, barrin' he had the wings o' the grey hawk an' the bold heart of it. An' beyant the plain, stretchin' to the west, was a deep forest. But nowhere was sign o' livin' men.

For just a moment he looked back over the road he'd come by : an' as he did that same he heard a small chucklin' laugh round behind him. Sure, he turned again in a jiffy, but all that met his eye was a glint o' somethin' red, down among the rocks beside the path.

Well, he was afther it with all his speed, but never a bit did it come in his road, though he looked every way at once. An' at last, when he found himself by the foot o' the path, down on the broad plain, for all the world he could not tell by what way he had come down the rocks.

But for all the sunset was fadin' fast, there was no fear o' the night in the heart

o' Dermond. He looked over the valley, an' saw far off where four oak trees grew close by each other, like they were the corners of a cabin : an' when he reached them he thought in his mind that there he would sleep till the morn's mornin', supper or none.

'Twas dark then, an' he lay down on the long grass, an' soon fell to sleepin', an' never woke nor stirred till 'twas far past moonrise, when he leaped up all sudden like, thinkin' he heard his name. But none answered his callin'.

An' as he stepped close to one o' the oaks—that which stood to the south (an' 'twas that way he would have taken to return to the cabin o' Cormac, his father) —he heard the far-off playin' of a harp ; an' it came to him that 'twas Conan, his youngest brother, was touchin' it. So he listened, quiet like, an' sure enough 'twas a lament for Cormac without a Kingdom was ringin' in his ears.

Then right close, almost at his feet, was a sound like a little small voice laughin',

as he had heard it on the Path o' the Rocks. He quick reached out his hand to catch whoever it was, an' went creepin' toward it, till he touched the next tree, that was toward the east. An' as he stood gropin' round, he heard other laughin'—like that o' the maids o' Princess Maurya, who had jeered at him in the hall for wearin' the old jerkin o' King Cormac, for which he had torn the silver cloth from the wall an' made himself a cloak, an' lost his power by that same.

An' a girl's voice was sayin': "A pretty set o' champions come for our princess, with their old green coats; when she wears nothin' poorer nor silk an' stuff o' gold." An' more he listened, an' heard the voice o' Eiveen, his brother that was next him in years, an' that o' Princess Maurya answerin'. An' the small voice down by his feet chuckled again.

By now Dermond guessed well that some spell lay on the trees, makin' his ears hear what was far away; so he went on to the

third, which was to the north o' the rest, an' hearkened; but there he heard naught but the sighin' o' wind, an' the beatin' o' waves on the shore. An' he knew that the sea was many a mile beyant.

He thought o' the Little People that had favoured Cormac, his father; an' as the moon rose higher, he looked to see them under the branches o' the oaks; but they must have crept under the fallen acorn cups, for not a red cap could he spy.

At last he put his hand on the trunk o' the fourth tree, an' that was west, an' farther up the valley than he had gone. An' seemin' as if 'twas comin' out o' the wide spreadin' branches or the flutterin' o' the leaves, he heard the speakin' of a strange voice in his ears; an' 'twas an old man's, sayin':—

“'Tis time for the plantin' o' me field. Heart o' me life, is the seed ready?”

An' the one answerin' had the softest voice that had ever been heard o' Dermond. Sure, the tremblin' o' Conan's harp was harsh beside it.

"Ay, father," 'twas sayin', "an' who comes to sow it? An' when will be the harvestin'?"

"That shall be known when one comes for hirin'. None may sow that seed but a man without fear o' fortune; an' none may harvest it with doubt in his heart."

Dermond was listenin' hard; but just then a cloud passed across the moon, an' the words ended. Long time he waited to hear if that soft voice wasn't speakin', but 'twas no use at all; an' at last he wandered out away from the trees an' into the plain, an' lay down on the open ground an' fell to sleepin' again, for he was weary with all his climbin'.

This time when he woke, 'twas with more laughin' in his ears, an' the sun shinin' bright as ever. He gripped his bow tight, an' sprang to his feet in a great haste; an' there, standin' a little ways off, was a girl, all in pale green like the young birches in the heart o' spring, and the laughter was runnin' over her face like ripplin' wather.

Dermond stood dumbfounded, for he had nigh forgot where he was, an' he looked round wondherin' like.

Then says the girl, that had never moved away at all from where she was standin' :—

“ 'Tis lost ye are.”

An' Dermond remembered the night, and knew it to be the soft voice o' her that had asked o' the harvestin'.

“ Nay,” says he. “ O' me own will came I here, seekin' fortune.”

“ An' what like is the fortune that ye seek ?” says she.

“ To find a kingdom where is good fightin' for one with a stout heart an' a sthrong arm ; an' to get me a princess for me wife,” says Dermond.

Then the girl laughed again, an' the sound o' that was like wind in the willow trees.

“ 'Tis a man's thought, truly ; an' I doubt not ye'll find kings' daughters a plenty, foldin' their hands an' waitin' to have ye come an' do some fine fightin' to win them.

As if that was the bravest work for a man! Did ye expect to be afther findin' yer princess growin' on a bush in this rich kingdom?" an' she waved her hand toward the valley.

"Where she is, there I'll find her; ay, an' win her," answered Dermond.

"Have ye no fear, that ye speak so bold?" asked the girl.

"I fear naught between the flyin' clouds above the hills an' the runnin' wather near our feet," says Dermond.

"An' what man are ye?" says she.

"Dermond o' the Bow, eldest son o' him who was Cormac without a Kingdom."

"An' for me name," says the soft voice, "'tis Etáin, daughter o' Dughall the Wise, who dwells beyant the forest to the west."

"An' is there none dwells with him but yerself?" asked Dermond.

"Why ask ye that?" says Etáin.

"'Tis time for plantin' his field," went on Dermond, hardly knowin' why he said it. An' Etáin looked at him mazed like.

“How knew ye that, seein’ that no man can tell when the hour comes but Dughall himself?”

“’Twas at moonrise I heard himself say it,” answered Dermond. “Yonder among the trees.”

“Then must ye have the favour o’ the Little People, for ’tis risk an’ peril for mortal man to pass near the Four Oaks o’ the Valley when the sun is high—far more at moonrise. Will ye come with me to Dughall?”

“Ay, if me fortune lies that road,” says he.

“That is as ye make it for yerself,” says Etáin; an’ for just a moment she stood lookin’ at him, an’ seein’ what a splendid fine sthrong man he was, with his shinin’ eyes an’ the black hair wavin’ far down over his shouldhers. An’ he looked at her blue eyes an’ rose-red lips that laughed whenever she began to think of anythin’; an’ there was no more rememberin’ o’ Princess Maurya—no, nor o’ the maids that served her, for him.

Then Etáin nodded her head, an' turned an' went over the grass toward the forest so swift that Dermond had all his feet could do to keep pace with her. There was no more speakin', but just followin', as she led the way over grass hillocks an' into the dark wood.

'Twas more nor one time the roots came nigh to thrippin' him off his feet; an' once he saw a little red cap under a fern, an' heard the quare laughin', but on he went, not heedin'.

After a time it was in his mind that the trees o' this forest grew in straight rows, as they had been an army o' men standin'; but just then Etáin turned an' beckoned him to come beside o' her. An' Dermond was not slow in doin' that.

"Are ye wise in thought an' speech?" asked she.

"No more nor other men," says Dermond.

"'Tis well ye're willin' to own it, then. Are ye stout o' heart?"

"'Tis not well for a man to be boastin',

as I found to me sorrow, but ready am I to serve ye with two sthrong arms."

"Why would ye serve me?" asked Etáin.

"For bein' the fairest maid in the land. An' I would ye were a right king's daughter," says Dermond.

"An' if I were?" asked she.

"Then would I win ye fairly."

"An' bein' none?" says she; an' as she spoke her eyes met Dermond's, an' a sudden fire leapt up in his heart.

"Then will I make ye one, if there's kingdoms to be won by the sthrong arm!"

With that Etáin smiled, well pleased with his manner o' speech; an' she says—

"If ye speak as fair as that to Dughall, then will ye have small need o' me wisdom. But should need come it shall all be for yer helpin', Dermond, son o' Cormac. An' now, here is me father's house, an' I bid ye welcome."

Sure enough, there before them was a long, low buildin', woven mainly o' the

rushes. But round it was no sign o' servin' man or maid at all. The door stood wide open, an' Etáin bent her sweet head an' stepped inside, an' Dermond went afther.

In a great chair by the far end o' the hall sat Dughall the Wise. His hair was white, an' his long beard rested on his knees; but his eyes saw far, an' as Dermond came nigh he rose, waitin' on Etáin, to see what she would be afther sayin'.

"'Tis Dermond o' the Bow, son o' Cormac the King," says she, "come to hire for seedin' an' harvestin'."

Now Dermond would have said nay to that, for he'd no mind for such labourin'; but her eyes were fair on him, an' he'd no will o' his own to do other than her pleasure.

"Ay, that am I," says Dermond.

Then Dughall looked at him well, an' says he—

"Many a rash man has spoken as ye speak, an' has tried to do what ye may fail in; an' no man has yet sowed that seed or gathered in that harvest, else would there

be a rich kingdom where is naught but wilderness."

"An' how may that be?"

"From over pride in wisdom," says Dughall, most bitterly, "in the day when Oisin, son o' Lua, came to this place, an' would match his craft with mine. An' not bein' content with the life that was mine, I made wager that I was sthronger. An' he overthrew me, an' laid a spell on all that was mine. An' naught could lift it till I held in me hand a grain o' ripe corn, that had been grown on the mountain-top yonder. Such o' me men as were willin' to try the sowin' an' harvestin' were spared me for a time, but the others he turned to trees. An' as each one failed in the task, he became a tree. Scarce any could reach the slope, for Oisin angered the Little People against me, an' placed them as guards round the base o' the mountain, where none might pass their land in safety. Bran, alone, that was chief huntsman, made his way to the top, but there was no right foothold, an' before

the seed was planted he fell, an' was never seen more. An' well may men call me Dughall the Wise, for I have shown great wisdom, an' lost the lives o' sthrong men."

Well, now, Dermond thought an' thought, rememberin' the sly laughin' o' the Little People. Yet it seemed to him that there should be some way for him to contrive success. So says he—

"An' where is this mountain?"

Dughall brought him to the door, an' pointed out where it rose toward the sky; an' 'twas a terrible steep place, all crags an' towerin' precipices, an' nigh on out o' reach o' mortal man, had there been no Little People guardin' it at all.

Then a thought came to Dermond, an' he turned to the old man.

"An' what for soldiers had ye? Were they sthrong in sword fightin', or were they betther at bendin' the bow?"

"Betther with the sword, Dermond son o' Cormac. No bowmen had I barrin' ten;

all whom were feared o' the Little People an' became trees."

"Ay," says Dermond. "Well, 'tis ill thinkin' o' grave matthers when one goes hungerin'. Have ye a bite o' food handy like, seein' that 'tis many hours I've been fastin'?"

Etáin laughed at his plight, an' brought him what was to be had—roast meat, an' cakes, an' mead in a great horn; an' when he had eaten an' drunk the last crumb an' dhrop, so that her eyes were wide with wondherin' at his appetite, he went out again an' looked at the top o' the mountain, while Dughall the Wise went back to his seat, expectin' little.

But Etáin stayed near Dermond, an' together they went nigh to the foot o' the mountain, but not on the land o' the Little People. There Dermond measured with his eye, an' saw that the place closest the mountain-top was a juttin' cliff on the side o' the neighbourin' peak.

"Have ye a fine cord?" he asked of Etáin.

"How long?" says she.

"To reach from the cliff side to the mountain-top."

"Nay," says she, "but I have that which will serve to make one." An' with that she let down her hair, an' it fell all round her like fair golden silk, reachin' her sandals o' fine deer-skin. An' she caught the little small knife from the belt o' Dermond an' cut through a great handful of it. Then Dermond took the knife an' did the same with his own hair, cuttin' it where 'twas longest. An' together they twisted it into a fine, long cord o' black an' gold colour.

"Now bring me the seed to be sowed," says he; an' this time 'twas Etáin sprang to do his biddin'. So he drew a straight arrow from the sheaf at his side, an' bound seven grains o' corn to it, all tied in a leaf with the end o' the cord. Then he rolled up the rest of it, an' started over to scale the cliff side, Etáin followin' him. At last he made his way up the cliff, to where was a little small

shelf o' rock, an' there he unrolled the ball o' cord an' steadied himself to shoot.

Then, seein' what he would be tryin', Etáin called out to him—

“First try the shot with another arrow, for fear o' missin'.”

“That is right wisdom,” says Dermond; an' he did that same, an' 'twas well he did, for the wind whirled it past the mountain-top, an' it broke on a rock below. But when he had shot twice more, he had the way o' the wind, an' could allow for it. An' the fourth arrow was the one with the corn tied to it. Dermond aimed it sthrong an' steady, an' sure enough it struck deep into the ground on the mountain-top, carryin' the cord with it; but the other end o' that same was fast tied to the belt o' Dermond.

An' lookin' down he could see the face of Etáin, an' her eyes were bright with gladness. Aah, 'twas not long before he was at her side, leavin' the cord end with a heavy stone on it to hold it there.

"How will ye gather the grain?" says she; yet half knowin' how 'twould be.

"By the cord that holds the arrow," says Dermond.

"An' if the birds fly down an' tear up the young plants?"

"That they shall not," says Dermond. So he made many arrows o' straight branches, an' some o' reeds. An' he planted seven other grains in the valley below. An' when the time was comin' that the sprouts would be comin' out o' the earth, he took his arrows up the cliff side, an' set himself to watchin'.

An' whenever a bird flew near the mountain-top, Dermond's arrows shot straight an' true, an' that bird came no more away from there. Ay, but 'twas weary stayin' there, for as he saw the green growin' higher an' higher, he dared not so much as think o' leavin' the cliff side, for fear o' disasther. If ye'll believe it, 'twas nigh on three months that he spent on that shelf, havin' no mind to be turned into oak or

fir tree. But one there was who would not leave him in danger o' starvin', an' Etáin was that same.

At last the grain ripened in the valley, an' by that Dermond knew that his time o' triumphin' was comin'. He called Dughall from his hall, an' ye could have heard his voice ringin' out for a mile.

An' then he lifted the cord an' began to pull. Now 'twas hard gettin' the plants loose, for the roots had sthruck deep into the earth; an' all round him he seemed to be hearin' the Little People jeerin' at him an' waitin' for the rope to break. An' for a moment his strength was naught.

Then he called down to the one who stood nearest—

“Mouth o' roses, are ye there?”

“Ay,” says Etáin.

“Then laugh! Laugh yer sweetest, or I'll fail an' come to ill yet.”

An' up rose her laughter like bells o' gold, an' the music o' that put the strength o' seven into the arms o' Dermond—for no

more could he hear the tauntin' o' the Little People.

He gave one more steady pull, an' down flew the stalks o' ripe corn, roots an' leaves an' all, at the feet o' Dughall the Wise, an' he caught them up an' held the grain safe in his hand!

[“And what happened then?”

“Why, sure, all the trees turned back into the armed men o' Dughall, an' his low house into a fine royal palace for them all, an'—an'——”

“And they lived happy ever after?”

“Ever afther. An' all because Etáin laughed sweeter nor the Little People. There's a mighty power in a laugh.”

“And if she hadn't, wouldn't there have been any story?”

“No, naught but one more tall tree in the forest o' Dughall. An' now away with yees, before ye have me laughin' in spite o' meself.”]

III

EIVEEN COLD-HEART



III

EIVEEN COLD-HEART

[“Now why an’ ever should I be wastin’ me good time chatterin’ to yees? Sure, ’tis coaxin’ the very pipe out o’ me mouth ye’ll be, next, with the soft talk o’ yees. Listen now.”]

YE mind what I told yees about the sons o’ Cormac? How they all tried their fortune, wantin’ to marry King Murdough’s daughter an’ take the labour o’ rulin’ his kingdom off his shouldhers? An’ how Dermond, that was oldest, was beaten by fat Eocha the cook; an’ Eiveen, that came next, was tripped up by Kevin the groom—an’ all because they were shamed o’ wearin’ Cormac’s old jerkin? An’ ye’ll mind how Dermond went off an’ found fortune beyant the Path o’ the Rocks? Well, then, ’tis

Eiveen the Swift as I'll be afther tellin' about.

When the gate o' the castle shut behind him an' Maive the Fair, that had brought him the purse o' money from Princess Maurya, an' had followed him out o' the door, all the wits o' him couldn't tell him what way 'twas best to turn. He looked at Maive, thinkin' to open the door for her again, but she shook her head, holdin' fast to his hand all the while.

"Come, then," says Eiveen. "'Tis scant use our standin' here an' waitin' for the sun to start our shadows on the road." So he dropped the purse inside his huntin' bag, an' led the way down the path that went by the river bank; an' by him, in her cloak o' white wool that was fastened with a gold clasp, went Maive the Fair.

Now all that mornin' they met no one on the road, nor passed any house at all; an' never a word more did Eiveen say to Maive, for there were sore thoughts within him, o' Kevin the groom, an' o' the laughter in

King Murdough's castle. At last it came to be the middle o' the day, an' he saw that Maive was walkin' slow behind him, bein' weary; so he sat down under a tree by the roadside, an' took out some cakes from his huntin' bag.

An' as they were eatin', Eiveen looked at Maive. An' she was but a slip of a girleen, with brown eyes that saw straight into the heart o' him.

"Why did ye come with me?" asked Eiveen. "'Tis a hard road I must thavel, with the spite o' the Little People on me for me folly."

"For to take half o' the burden o' that from ye," says Maive. "Maybe they'll not be angry that long, if ye do naught else to turn them against ye."

"That may be a thrue word," says Eiveen, "but 'tis yer own choice to come, an' not mine to bring ye. Fortune an' power is what I'm searchin' for, an' naught else."

"Then 'twas not lovin' Princess Maurya ye were?" asked Maive.

"Not I," says Eiveen. "'Twas to rule the kingdom I came."

Now quare it was that afther hearin' him say those words, Maive was no longer weary. She ran to the river side an' brought him cool wather for dhrinkin' in her little golden cup; an' gave him the small sharp knife from her girdle, because that he had none o' his own; an' last of all she took the huntin' bag off the grass, where 'twas lyin', an' hung it round her neck. Then she nodded to him that 'twas time to be goin' on their road.

"An' 'tis careful we'll be not to vex the Little People," says she.

Now they hadn't gone but a bit o' the road when they met along with a quare, crooked little man, that was dhrivin' a crooked, quare small cow.

"Stand out, an' let me have the road for me cow," says he, in a thin, shakin' voice.

"Ye've yer share," answered Eiveen. "What's yer cow to me?" But Maive

dhrew him by to the grass, an' waved her hand to the quare man to be afther passin' on.

"Far betther for ye to turn back with me, Maive the Fair," says the little man. "'Tis long wantin' in happiness ye'll be with Eiveen Cold-Heart."

"Ay," laughed Maive, "but 'tis not me own happiness that I'm hopin' to find."

"An' why are ye callin' me Eiveen Cold-Heart, when 'tis Eiveen the Swift is me name?" asked Eiveen, angered.

"Look in that same heart, an' find yer answer," says the man; an' before they knew what had happened, sure, he was gone like the whiff o' smoke from a pipe.

"'Twas one o' the Little People," says Maive. "'Tis well to speak them fair, if more should be on the road."

"Ay, there's truth in that," says Eiveen. An' so they went on their way, Maive singin' to him to cheer the goin'.

Now 'twas drawin' toward night when they came in sight of a small child sittin' in

the road, where 'twas narrow, between two high banks.

"Make room for us to pass," says Eiveen, for he was wantin' to reach some restin' place for the night.

"First help me out o' this," says the child, wailin'. "'Tis me foot is caught in the crack o' the stones."

"Get it out yerself, an' out o' me way," says Eiveen. But Maive knelt down an' pulled the rough stones away with her soft white hands, an' the child stood up.

"Far wiser were ye to turn yer steps an' follow me, Maive the Fair," says he. "'Tis but little love ye'll win from Eiveen Cold-Heart."

Maive looked back along the road, but she shook her head bravely, not sayin' a word. 'Twas Eiveen was fierce at that.

"Why are ye callin' me out o' me name?" says he. "'Tis Eiveen the Swift ye'll be findin' me!" An' he started to catch the child. But there, before he'd stepped fair out o' his tracks, he could see no child nowhere.

“’Tis the Little People are vexed when ye speak sharp,” says Maive.

“I’d forgot that,” says Eiveen. “Next time I’ll have care o’ me words.”

Now it grew fast darker as they walked on in the narrow path, an’ the night birds were callin’ in the trees. By-an’-by they came to a wider place, near the river, where willows grew; an’ under the boughs was a light shinin’, faint an’ waverin’.

“’Tis a cabin there,” says Maive. “We may get fire to warm us.”

“Ay, an’ food to eat, for I’ve no more o’ that but one crust,” says Eiveen. An’ as they came nearer they saw an old, withered-lookin’ crone crouchin’ by the door-stone. Eiveen spoke up to her—

“Is it fire on the hearth ye have? The night grows chill.”

“Ay,” says she, “there’s fire for warmin’ Maive the Fair, but the flame would die if ye entered me cabin, Eiveen Cold-Heart.”

At this he turned on his heel, angry; but Maive dhrew him to sit on the grass, an’

heaped up dhry sticks, an' slipped by the old woman into the door, an' brought out a lighted turf to make a bit o' fire on the ground. Then Eiveen took out the crust, an' gave part to Maive.

"'Tis starved I am," says the old crone. "Have ye no bite to spare for me?"

"Nay," says Eiveen, glad to spite her for misnamin' o' him; but Maive broke her bit in two, an' gave half to the woman. Then she brought wather from the river in her cup. An' as she was comin' back over the grass, the crone said—

"Far safer were ye to stay in me cabin with me, Maive the Fair, than to be wearin' the sandals from yer little white feet followin' Eiveen Cold-Heart."

"Nay," laughed Maive. "'Tis naught but his own word shall part me from him while there's service I can do to help him to his heart's wish."

"If it's that ye're waitin' for," says Eiveen, "go yer way where ye will. I'll reach fortune sooner without ye."

As he spoke those hard words, the old crone stood up an' pointed her staff at Maive, but her eyes were on Eiveen.

"Go, then," says she. "Find yer fortune as ye will, an' see naught o' Maive but the want o' her an' the shadow o' her, till ye've warmed that cold heart ye carry."

An' as Eiveen sprang up from the log where he'd been sittin', sure, in place o' Maive in her white cloak was nothin' but a slendher, young, white birch tree; an' nowhere was cabin, nor crone, nor so much as a spark o' fire burnin' at all. 'Twas all alone he was under the willows, an' no sound but the splashin' o' the runnin' river over the stones in the darkness o' the night.

Well, he pushed his way here an' there through the trees, lookin' for Maive, but nowhere could he spy a glint o' the white cloak; an' at last, bein' too weary to go farther, he lay down on the turf and slept. All through the night he dreamed o' tryin' to reach a white birch tree. 'Twas always

growin' far ahead, up a steep hillside, an' he could never come nigh it.

When first he woke in the mornin', he felt a sharp wind blowin' from the north across him, an' yet he wasn't cold, for over him seemed to be lyin' Maive's cloak o' soft wool. But when he rose, it was nowhere around.

"Small use in stayin' here," thought Eiveen; so afther givin' one more look among the trees in search o' Maive, he turned to the path by the river, an' went his way.

'Twas lonesome walkin', that. All the time he felt somethin' lackin', an' not knowin' what it was. By an' beyant, as noon was near, he came to an inn by the road, an' asked in it for food.

"Have ye money to pay for it?" asked the man.

Then of a sudden Eiveen minded that his purse o' money was in the huntin' bag over Maive's shouldhers. He set off, runnin' back by the way he'd come, an' when 'twas

nigh dusk he came to the willows. An' there was the dark cabin, an' the crone crouchin' on the door-stone, an' by her a slim, white girleen.

"Maive!" he called, forgettin' the ill words he'd given her. "Are ye not comin' with me?" But she stepped back from him, an' the crone laughed.

"'Tis for the bag ye came, an' not for Maive the Fair. Ask her for it, an' be-gone!"

Eiveen hastened towards Maive, an' right then a mist blew over his eyes, an' there was naught but the birch tree an' the huntin' bag on the grass by it. He slung it over his arm, an' went off again. Too late it was for him to be afther reachin' the inn, so he had to sleep on the road. An' again he thought the cloak covered him from the night dews an' the cold. But wakin', it was gone.

At the inn he bought bread and meat, an' as he sat eatin' he couldn't put by the thought o' Maive sharin' her dhry crust with

the crone. An' he was full o' wrath at the Little People for takin' her from him. Presently by came ridin' a troop o' men in armour, all shinin'; an' their leader stopped an' spoke to Eiveen.

"What man's man are ye?"

"No man's man," says Eiveen, "but a king's son."

"What king is that?"

"Cormac without a Kingdom. His second son am I, named Eiveen the Swift."

"Then mount an' ride with me, an' it may be we'll find fightin' a plenty, an' win great honour. Cathal o' the Mountain am I, an' a good comrade is me heart's desire."

So Eiveen rode off to the north with Cathal, on a horse that was given him. But all through the day he was hearkenin' for the music o' Maive's singin', an' the road was long an' weary wantin' it. At last, far in the afternoon, Eiveen turned to Cathal.

"'Tis somethin' I've left behind that I miss sorely," says he. "I must ride back an' claim it."

“Go, then,” says Cathal, “an’ join us where we halt for the night, a bow-shot farther up this road, by the runnin’ brook.”

Eiveen rode off swiftly across the wild counthry toward the river, an’ again at dusk he came on the cabin. An’ Maive, standin’ among the shadows, faded as he neared her.

“Give me Maive, or ’twill go ill with ye!” he cried in anger to the old crone.

“Nay, Eiveen Cold-Heart, not yet warmed. ’Tis but wrath at losin’ what ye thought was yer own that brought ye back. Go, seek yer road to fortune!”

An’ then the mist clouded all from his eyes, an’ naught remained for him but just to ride back to Cathal.

Next mornin’ they all rode on to the north. An’ all day Eiveen kept seein’ the brown eyes o’ Maive in every shadow. When they passed the apple-trees the flowers were like her white hands, an’ the whish o’ the wind was like her steps in the grass.

Late in the day he turned to Cathal, an’ says he—

"I must go back for somethin'. 'Tis ill fortune that I left it."

"Nay," says Cathal, likin' it little. "If ye go from us again, ye need not come back."

"Then will I seek honour elsewhere," says Eiveen. He sprang from the horse, an' tossed the bridle to Cathal.

"Take back yer gift," says he. "'Tis afther seekin' me treasure I'll be, an' not givin' over till I find it."

So off he went, across hill an' valley, toward the far river. An' though 'twas Eiveen the Swift he was, the night was gone an' early dawn breakin' before he reached the willows again. Through the trees he saw the cabin, an' the old woman, but Maive was not there.

"Maive!" he called. An' "Maive!"

"Why have ye come?" asked the crone. "Are ye seekin' a servant for carryin' yer bag?"

"Nay," says Eiveen. "'Tis I would serve her."

“Then bring wather from the river to the birch tree, for ’tis droopin’ for wantin’ that same.”

Then Eiveen took his huntin’ bag an’ filled it with wather, an’ poured it on the roots. An’ for three days he went back an’ forth, thinkin’ o’ naught but how to keep the slendher white birch tree from fadin’ away.

An’ on the third day, as he saw how it was witherin’, he knelt down at its roots, sorrowin’.

“What would ye if ye had but one wish to be granted?” asked the old crone, pityin’ him.

“Maive,” says Eiveen.

“An’ not fortune an’ power?”

“Nay, ’twas happier I was in Cormac’s cabin with neither,” says Eiveen. An’ as he spoke, ’twas two hot tears dropped on the roots o’ the little tree.

Then ’twas as if mist rolled away, an’ the sun shone down on him in gladness, for there by him stood Maive, with her

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brown eyes lookin' laughin' into his warm heart.

An' together they went back across the hills to the Lough o' the Eagle, knowin' that the Little People were no more vexed.

IV

THE QUESTIN' O' CLEENA



IV

THE QUESTIN' O' CLEENA

[“A truce to fightin', now. Not one word comes out o' me mouth till ye're as whist as lambs hearkenin' for the grass to grow. Ay, see now, how aisy it comes!”]

MEN were sthrong men in those days, but never one at the court o' King Murdough had come nigh matchin' Feargus the Black, till the sons o' Cormac set foot there. Many a time he thought how 'twas the green jerkin an' the power o' the Little People backin' that same that had lost him the fight; though he'd wit enough to hold his tongue, an' not risk the angerin' o' King Murdough. But 'twas ever in his mind that some day he'd prove himself as good a man as Conan o' the Long Arms.

Now there came a day when King Murdough had a message in hand for Torcall the Dane, that dwelt nigh the shores o' Moyle. An' 'twas a sharp word was to be sent, an' full o' peril to him that carried it.

The King sat on his high seat, when all was ready, an' looked round the hall, where stood many to do his biddin'. An' in a far corner, by the wide fireplace, Feargus the Black was talkin' with Cleena, his daughter.

Then says King Murdough, in a quiet small voice, as he'd been talking to himself—

“Is there a man can carry me word to Torcall the Dane, an' bring me his throe answer without failin'?”

Half o' those in the hall paid no heed at all, but Cleena caught the hand o' Feargus.

“'Tis yer chance,” she whispered. “Go forward an' claim the right.”

So like a flash Feargus pushed through

the crowd an' knelt to King Murdough; though many were drawin' back, seein' that Torcall was no child to be reckoned with.

"What would ye have?" asked the King.

"Leave to carry the word to the shores o' Moyle," answered Feargus.

Murdough shook his head, for 'twas not in his heart to lose a good warrior like Feargus to the Danes, when a lesser would do as well.

"Such work is not for ye," he says. "Wait, for the hour o' battle will come afther."

"Give me leave to go, King Murdough," says Feargus again.

"Nay," says King Murdough, "for there's many a chance that who goes will not return."

Then Conan spoke, that had been sittin' by the King—

"'Tis right he has. Give him leave for seven days an' seven, to go to the shores o' Moyle an' to return; an' if he comes again

in safety, at me side shall he fight the men o' Torcall."

Feargus looked at Conan, that was wed to Princess Maurya, an' for the first time a flash o' friendship was in the meetin' o' their eyes.

"Come back will I, Conan o' the Kingdom. In seven days an' seven more I'll claim that word from ye."

With that Conan loosed the huntin' horn from his belt, an' gave it to Feargus.

"'Tis a token o' the word I've given ye," says he. "Return it in the time set, an' lead the battle with me. An' carryin' it ye'll be safe from the Little People, but use it only in yer sorest need."

So before night fell, Feargus' the Black was ridin' away to the sea, an' none with him but Kevin the groom. An' Cleena stood on the castle wall, with her black hair hangin' round her, an' watched him go.

Each day, when it neared sunset, she went up in the tower, lookin' for him; an' it came to be seven days an' three more,

then seven days an' four more, an' no word o' Feargus.

Now the next day to that was a great huntin', an' Conan an' Princess Maurya rode out at the head o' the court, all dressed in gay colours. But Cleena watched from the tower, an' King Murdough slept.

When the sun was turnin' to the west, an' all noise o' the huntin' was far an' away, she saw a man runnin' along the path by the river. An' as he neared the ford, she saw 'twas Kevin the groom. Like a hawk from the clouds she was at the gate before any other could reach it.

"Where left ye Feargus?" she cried; an' Kevin the groom crouched down on the stones, fearin' the great dark eyes o' her that were lookin' through an' through him, an' callin' him coward for leavin' his masher.

"'Tis not for me to say," he whispered, nigh on spent with the runnin'. "When we were passin' the head o' the valley o' the Dark Lough, he dropped the horn o' Conan; an' when he turned back to search for it,

for 'twas his token from the prince, I lost sight o' him, an' could find naught o' him, though I called many times over."

"An' yer horses?" asked Cleena.

"When I came back to where I had tied them, they were gone, an' no trace to be seen. 'Tis the Little People have stolen them all away. Ay, that it is."

Then Cleena turned to those in the courtyard, an' there were not many, for all the fightin' men were off at the huntin', an' says she—

"Who dares go back to the Valley o' the Dark Lough to find Feargus?"

But none answered. An' as for Kevin the groom, he slipped away, for fear o' bein' made to show the way.

"Is there not one man among ye to be friend to Feargus?" asked Cleena, lookin' from one to the other, an' waitin' for who should step forward. But a hard man an' a proud was Feargus, an' now, in his need, none dared brave the Little People to aid him.

Then came scorn to the eyes o' Cleena,

an' she turned an' passed them, holdin' her cloak to her that it might not touch them.

"All this shall King Murdough hear when he wakes; an' Princess Maurya, when she comes from the huntin'; an' Conan o' the Kingdom shall reckon with ye. But for me, I go alone to seek Feargus the Black, where ye dare not follow."

With that she went into the stable, an' there lay Cian, the waitin' boy, sound sleepin'. As she brushed by him, he woke an' sprang up.

"What would Lady Cleena?" he asked.

"A horse, that I may ride to seek for Feargus, who is lost by the Dark Lough."

"Is there no man to go?" asked Cian.

"Nay," says she, "none but children tremblin' for fear o' the Little People."

"Then will I ride with ye," cried Cian. "Though I have but a boy's strength in fightin', yet was me mother a wise woman, an' taught me many a cunnin' charm."

So Cian brought out two horses, an' together they rode out o' the gate an' across

the ford, Cleena never lookin' back to the castle. All through the night they rode, pressin' on with naught but the noise o' the ripplin' water for guidin'; an' in the mornin' there still lay many a mile before them. Yet they never dhrew rein, for 'twas the sixth day afther the seventh, an' there was mountains to pass.

As the sun went down the west, they saw a deep valley before them, an' in it a lough, with a bit of an island in it; an' the wather was as smooth an' dark as black marble.

Cleena slipped from her horse, an' Cian the same, an' together they tied the horses to a tree, Cian twistin' the bridles in a strange knot, that the Little People should have no power for untyin' them.

"Where now, Lady Cleena?" says Cian.

"Down yon glen, to seek Feargus," says she.

"An' I with ye," says Cian.

"Nay," answered Cleena. "I bid ye wait here, that there shall be one to tell all

to Princess Maurya if I come not back by mornin'."

"Then hearken to me," says Cian. "Trust naught in man's shape till he pass through fire an' wather; an' touch the hand o' none ye meet, be it Feargus himself."

So Cleena caught her cloak o' gold an' scarlet over her arm, an' went from him, in the light o' sunset. An' soon she came to a place where the trees grew closer, an' there was scant room for her to pass under their boughs. But as she bent, she saw a glint o' gold in a heap o' dead leaves, an' there lay the huntin' horn o' Conan.

'Twas quick up in her hand, with its cord passed round her white neck; an' the courage o' ten came into her heart. Down the valley she passed, lookin' every way for a sight o' Feargus, an' callin' his name now an' again; but none answered.

'Twas mortal dark down at the wather's edge, an' what way to turn was more nor she knew.

"'Tis sore needin' help I am," says she;

an' with that she blew a soft note on the horn. It echoed all down the lough, like the tremblin' of a bell, an' before it had fair died away, she saw on the sand a little boat o' skins, like the fishers use, with a paddle swingin' in the wather. Cleena waited for no thinkin', but stepped in an' paddled toward the island.

There was no sign o' life on it, but she tied the boat to a bush that hung over low, with that same knot o' Cian's. Then from the fold o' her girdle she took flint an' steel that he'd given her, an' made a bit o' fire to light a dhry branch that lay handy. With that torch she went on, an' soon found the island cut in two by a narrow ditch o' wather. Howsomever, she leaped over it, an' again called Feargus.

There was a rustlin' in the leaves, an' a voice answerin'—

“Cleena! Daughter!”

“Father! Come!” she cried again; an' out o' the dusk came a tall man, an' the light from the torch fell on the very face o'





"Nay," says Cleena, "come ye over."

Feergus. She was just goin' to run to him, when sudden she thought what Cian had said, an' she slipped back past the ditch, holdin' the torch to light him. He came to the edge, reachin' out his hand.

"Help me to cross. 'Tis mortal weary I am," says he.

"Nay," says Cleena, "come ye over." But with that word he was naught but dhriven mist.

"'Twas his shadow," thought Cleena; an' turnin', she went the other way, still callin' on Feergus. By an' beyant she heard a branch breakin', an' again a dark figure answered her callin'; an' again 'twas the likeness o' Feergus.

Now here was no wather to cross; so quick, to try was it a throe man, she held down her torch an' set fire to some withered leaves.

"Come to me by that," says she.

"Give me yer hand first," says the other, movin' near.

"Nay," says Cleena; an' 'twas as if smoke

blew away an' left no man behind. Just then she heard a sound at her feet ; an' there, lyin' in the grass, was Feargus again, bound hand an' foot.

"Loose me, if it be Cleena, an' not the banshee," he groaned.

"Wait," says Cleena, runnin' back to the lough's edge, an' dippin' the scarf from her neck in the wather. 'Twas with fire an' wather she returned to Feargus, an' with the burnin' end o' her brand she parted the cords that bound him. Seein' that he never flinched at the fire, she quenched the sparks on his coat with the wet scarf. Still Feargus was before her, an' she began to believe it himself.

"Rise an' follow," says she ; an' he obeyed, seemin' half sleepin'. She led the way to the boat, not lookin' back till she was in it ; an' then, when she turned, in the gloom stood three Fearguses, each bendin' forward to enter the boat, an' naught to show which was her father. A sore tremblin' came over her ; an' then she raised the horn an' blew a brave blast.

Smoke cleared away overhead, an' mist drifted across the wather, but the throe Feargus stepped into the end o' the boat, an' sat quiet while she paddled back to the shore. Sort o' dazed he was still, as he followed her up the glen to where Cian was waitin' with their horses, but not until he was fair in the moonlight outside did he come to his right senses.

"'Tis yerself, Cleena!" says he.

"Ay," says she. "A far road have I come to find ye, father."

"An' 'tis love I'll be owin' ye all me days for that same," says he. "Where is Kevin the groom, an' me horses?"

"'Tis Kevin is not worth the words ye're wastin' on him," says she. "An' as for the horses, 'tis himself says that the Little People had taken them while he was seekin' ye. Take ye mine, an' save yer honour with Prince Conan, an' I'll ride slow with Cian."

"Nay," says the lad. "Try first the power o' the huntin' horn."

Cleena took it from her neck an' held it

out to Feargus. An' at the blast he blew, out o' the forest came the horses that had been lost by Kevin.

"Lose no time," called Cian. "'Tis nigh on mornin', an' this seven days afther the seventh."

"Then haste's our word," says Feargus.

An' quick into the saddles they sprung; an' swift they rode across the hills to the road up the river. 'Twas a long weary ride was before them, but on they pushed, waitin' for neither rest nor food; an' as the sun neared the trees to the west, they rode to the ford.

An' there stood Conan o' the Kingdom, with Princess Maurya by him. Sure, Feargus sprang down an' held out the horn. An' says he—

"Torcall refuses tribute, Prince Conan; but 'tis as yer friend I'll fight at yer side in the battle where we overcome him. For if the Little People helped ye at yer need, sure, 'tis meself would never be here but for the aidin' of a slip of a girl an' a bit of a lad."

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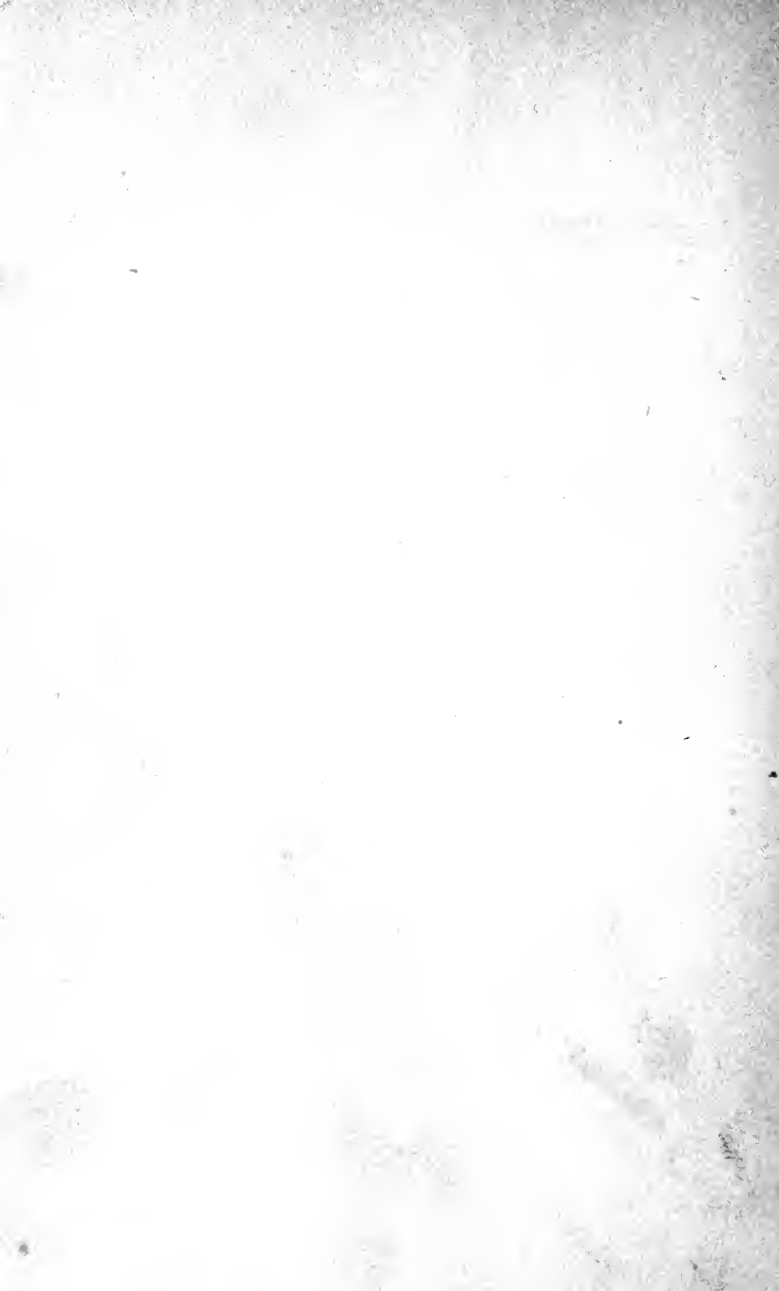
So they clasped hands like sthrong men ;
an' from the warriors o' King Murdough
came a great shout ; an' into the castle they
went with high honour.

[“ But Kevin the groom ? ”

“ Sure, he slipped out o' the tale
entirely, for very shame ; an' that's why
I never knew the bad end he came
to.”]

V

ETHLENN O' THE MIST



V

ETHLENN O' THE MIST

[“Give me half a quarter of a minute for thinkin', now; an' hear the rale old tale I'll be afther tellin' yees, o' years long gone an' far away.”]

IN the days when King Murdough held power far an' wide, the River o' White Rapids flowed from the far hills an' plunged down the cliffs into the Sea o' Moyle. 'Twas naught but a dotteen of a sthream where it started, as it might ha' dhropped out o' the rain clouds; but afther it reached the deep glen in the forest, it ran dark an' swift, an' was ill to pass over, barrin' 'twas at Ath nan Ciar.

The meanin' o' that same was the Ford o' the Shadow; an' 'twas a braver hunter nor most that would near it afther sundown, for

dread o' meetin' Ethlenn o' the Mist. So it happened that few had seen the grey roof o' her dwellin', bein' content with the tales told of it. Yet was there that in the tales which made many a man dhream o' passin' the ford an' winnin' her.

Now 'twas late in the year, an' beginnin' to be cool at dusk, when a man on a black horse came ridin' up the long hill slopes an' through the low bushes toward Ath nan Ciar; an' no fearin' was in his heart. 'Twas a windless night, an' sound o' his comin' carried far; even to where Ethlenn sat in her hall with her three maids, before a pile o' burnin' logs.

One was spinnin' threads o' silver like moonlight on wather; an' one was standin' weavin' in a loom; an' the third, that was kneelin' in the firelight, was playin' on a golden harp the song o' the sea waves breakin' on the shelvin' sand. But Ethlenn sat lookin' into the leapin' flames.

An' says the one that was spinnin'—

“A sthrong lad was he that came in the dawn, but where is he now?”

Then the girl that wove in the loom answered—

“He sits by the ford, with a cold wound in his arm. An' 'twill be a lesson to him to hold his hands from Ethlenn o' the Mist.”

But Ethlenn said naught.

Then spoke again the maid who was spinnin'—

“An' sure, 'twas a stout soldier that waded the ford at the noon, but where is he now?”

The girl that knelt playin' sad on the harp answered her—

“He lies by the River o' White Rapids, with the cold above his heart; an' never again will he think to grasp Ethlenn o' the Mist an' force her to follow him. Like clear glass in runnin' wather she was gone from his sight; an' the chill touch is with him in rememberin'.”

An' Ethlenn laid her little white hand—like a blossom it was—on a knife that hung in her girdle, gleamin' like clear crystal. At

last she spoke—lookin' in the deep o' the fire.

“’Tis the sound o' horse's feet beyant the ford I'm hearin'.”

The spinner rested her distaff an' hearkened.

“Nay,” says she; “’tis but the beatin' o' the surf at the foot o' the cliff.”

“An' I hear the voice of a man urgin' his horse to the ford.”

The weaver leaned her head back an' was still, while the fire-sparks flew up.

“’Tis naught but the moanin' o' the night owls, Lady Ethlenn,” says she, an' turned to her loom.

“An' sure, ’tis the clankin' of armour is in me ears, an' one stands by the door waitin' to knock!” called out Ethlenn.

“Who dares?” cried the harp player, sthrikin' a wild note; an' all sprang to their feet as they heard a sudden rappin' without.

None moved, but in another breath the door was flung wide, an' on the threshold stood a tall, sthrong soldier. The light

from within shone on his armour, all made o' linked silver rings; an' his face was that o' one well used to commandin'. He looked for a time at Ethlenn, wondherin' no more at the tales told o' her beauty.

She glanced at him, careless like, an' turned back to her seat by the hearth—her pale brown hair fallin' wavin' round her from the circlet o' gold on her head like the cloud above a watherfall; an' the long lashes drooped over her dark eyes—as she had no thought o' the sthranger in her hall.

An' the spinner sent her distaff twirlin' on; an' on flew the shinin' shuttle through the web in the loom; but the third—an' Deòin was her name—let her harp fall clangin' to the floor as she faced him.

“Yer will?” says she, comin' forward.

“'Tis by no will o' mine I come, but for carryin' a word from King Murdough, overlord on the shores o' Moyle,” answered the warrior.

“Is he over-lord o' the mist an' the

shadow?" asked the one weavin', standin' slendher an' proud at the loom.

"Nay; an' for that am I come to Lady Ethlenn to ask o' her what none other can grant."

At that Ethlenn turned her head an' signed him to a bench before her.

"Yer name?" she asked.

"Cathal o' the Mountain," answered the man, seatin' himself. An' a chill feelin' went through the sthrong heart o' him, when he reached out his hands to warm them, an' found no more heat in the flames than if they'd been rays o' moonlight. But Ethlenn laughed.

"An' what will King Murdough of Ethlenn?"

"'Tis yer power for aidin' Conan o' the Kingdom he asks," says Cathal, settin' his mind not to fear her. "Many days ago he sent to Torcall the Dane, demandin' the tribute due. An' Torcall, seein' in his harbour the long ships o' Sitric Silverbeard, his brother, laughed in scornin' o'

Murdough; an' Feargus the Black, who rode with the message, could ill win back to the King. So there was much talkin' o' war through the land, an' many men o' stout heart gathered round the castle o' Murdough. 'Twas thirty an' more that rode with me; an' many more with other chiefs. An' with Conan to lead, we took the road o' the river to the sea.

“Now Feargus, that before had been enemy to Prince Conan, fought beside him as by a brother; an' each made a vow to stand by the other in war an' in time o' peace, swearin' before the crossed staff an' serpent. Then Kevin the groom, that Feargus had beaten for mistreatin' his horse, slipped off an' told all to Torcall, within the town. Ill be to him for that same, for by night came the Danes, an' took Feargus sleepin', an' carried him on a boat, an' so to the *Long Wave*, where Sitric has him in keepin', threatenin' to put knife to his heart if Conan tries rescue, or does harm to the town o' Torcall.”

"But why come to me?" asked Ethlenn.

"For this. All men know the power of Ethlenn over mist an' shadow; an' would ye come with me to the shore, an' dhraw down clouds to hide the sea, we might reach the ships an' bring Feargus safe out o' their hands. 'Tis no aid in fightin' we're askin', but the chance for fair battlin' with the Danes."

Ethlenn rose to her feet, an' in her eyes was the comin' storm. Her dress, that had been white as foam undher the moon, now showed grey as wreaths o' fog creepin' up on the sand, an' her dagger seemed a sharp icicle.

"Met ye any on yer way?" she asked.

"Ay," answered Cathal. "Two from the court o' Murdough, that started on this same errand to ye, but fell by the way. Wherefore had I more need to press on."

"An' was it for that sake I was to be dragged from shelter an' carried prisoner to Prince Conan?" cried Ethlenn, the wind risin' sudden an' shriekin' round the outer

walls as she spoke. An' the three that served her left their places an' came nigher. But Cathal stood firm.

“ May sore hurt come to them that would have done it,” says he. “ Lyin' knaves are any who put ill deeds at the door o' Conan. 'Tis o' yer free will ye shall come or stay. As for those who came before me, me hand shall pay them.”

Then Ethlenn was silent, an' all that looked to her. Even the risin' wind waited on her words. At last she spoke—

“ That payin' is done, Cathal o' the Mountain. 'Tis for many a day they will be mindin' the reckonin' of Ethlenn. An' here is me word for yer fair speakin'. Here stand I, Ethlenn o' the Mist; an' a sthrong warrior are ye, Cathal. If ye can set me on yer horse fairly, I will ride with ye to the camp o' Conan, an' raise mist to cover the waves. If ye fail, ye shall go from here without hurt; an' if ye win, I look to ye to give me free returnin' when I have aided Prince Conan.”

Now Cathal was watchin' close, an' before she had fair ended speakin' he shouted—"Me word for it!" an' sprang to grasp her. The three maids laughed an' turned each to her task, not fearin' for Ethlenn.

As Cathal's arms met where she had been, Ethlenn was gone. He sudden remembered the tales told o' her; how she could change her seemin' in the eyes o' those that would hold her, by the power lyin' in her shinin' knife. So for all the seemin' he held fast, knowin' that she was there, an' feelin' what he could not see.

When he still kept his hold, the first maid laughed, an' there in his arms lay a sheaf o' red roses, an' their sharp thorns pierced his armour.

Still he held fast. Then the second maid called out a wild word, an' the roses were gone, an' through his arms fluttered many little small birdeens, flyin' in his face, an' fair takin' his breath. Yet quick he caught one in his hand an' clasped it close, for all it pecked him like a wild fierce thing.

Then Deòin sthruick her harp, an' the birds were away, an' rain an' chilly sleet were beatin' over him, an' all the hall was dark. He came nigh to lettin' go, then, but in his palm he caught some dhrops o' wather, an' covered it sure with the other.

Then all disappeared, an' the pale fire shone out again; an' while there was still no sign of Ethlenn, he sudden felt some-thin' catch in the rings o' his armour. Swift he put down his hand, an' 'twas the ice cold hilt o' the crystal dagger. An' as he grasped it, there stood Ethlenn with fear in her eyes.

"Give me the dagger!" she cried, "an' I'll ride with ye. 'Tis o' no use to ye alone."

"When ye're fair seated on me horse," laughed Cathal, knowin' that he'd won.

Without a word more, she was out o' the hall like a blown feather, to where the black horse was waitin'. Cathal leaped to the saddle an' swung her up before him; then put the knife in her girdle o' threaded

pearls. Off they galloped under clear moonlight, past the Ford o' the Shadow; an' swift along the river bank to where Conan's men were gathered.

There was cryin' o' welcome, but Conan lost no time. Quick he led her to the shore, an' pointed to the warships lyin' dark under the moon.

"Give us the boardin' o' them, an' choose what reward ye will from King Murdough, Lady Ethlenn," says he.

Then the smile glinted in her eyes, an' she ran her white hands through her silken hair; an' before any knew whence it came, the sea was covered with heavy fog, an' the moon peered among clouds. Conan an' his men ran to the waitin' boats, an' paddled from shore; but Ethlenn sat on a rock, partin' her wavin' hair. Once an' twice came the clashin' o' swords on shields o' bronze, through the darkness; an' at last up rose a wild shoutin' for joy, an' the boats swept inshore, with Feargus in the foremost. Conan o' the Kingdom sprang



“Quick he led her to the shore, an’ pointed to the warships lyin’ dark under the moon.”

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to the beach an' spoke to her that had given help—

“Have yer will; for 'tis ye that gave us the victory,” says he.

“Leave to return whence I was brought,” says she, an' would have naught else. Then Cathal spoke.

“It is right o' mine to carry her home.”

The two looked long in each other's eyes, an' at last Ethlenn shook her head.

“Nay, Cathal. Give me the horse, but 'tis for ye to stay here for the fightin'. When the battle is won, come in friendship where ye came doubtin'.” Springin' to the saddle, she rode away up the river bank. But in the hand o' Cathal lay the dagger o' crystal, an' he was content.

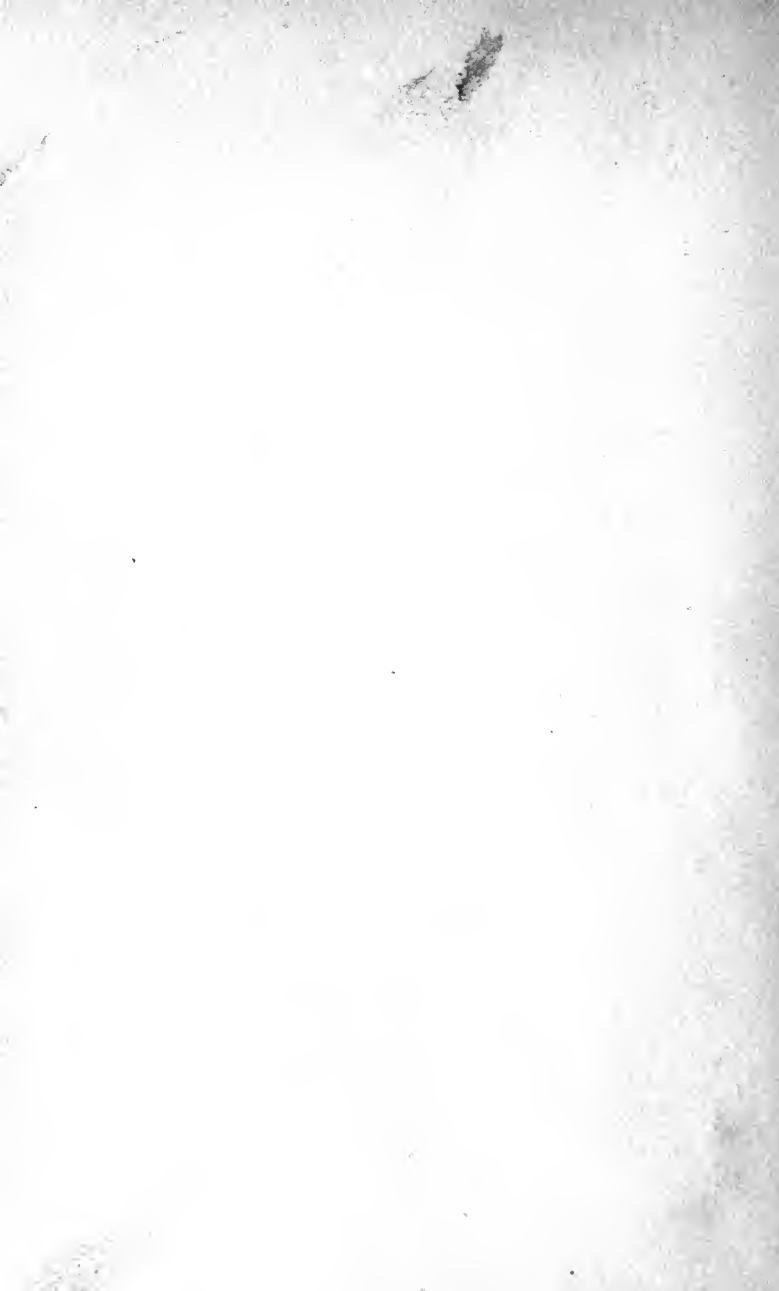
[“But what happened after the fighting was over?”

“Ah, sure, 'tis unsafe to be guessin' about Ethlenn. She might hear yees. So be off, an' make yer feet yer frinds.”]

Handwritten musical notation consisting of two lines of notes and rests, possibly representing a short piece or a specific exercise.

VI

WILD APPLES AN' GOLDEN GRAIN



VI

WILD APPLES AN' GOLDEN GRAIN

[“ Ay, wakin', sleepin', or dhreamin', 'tis forever an' more tales ye'd be afther hearkenin' to. Wait till the day when I tell yees what came once of askin' for too many o' them. No, not the now. 'Tis a far other sort I've in mind this morn's mornin'.”]

'Twas Keevan Sthrong-arm ruled the men o' the north, toward the sea-loughs. High up on the steep o' the cliff stood his walled tower; an' from the top o' that same he could see far out across the old sea, where few ships ventured, barrin' the Danes o' the North Isles.

Now 'twas for no fearin' o' the Danes for himself that he made thick walls an' sthrong doors to his tower; but for guardin' his

daughter, Ardanna, that was sought by many, far an' wide. A wilful maid was that, for a king's daughter—an' ill fared it with all who came courtin' her. Many a stout young warrior she turned away sorrowin'; yet all the days she was growin' fairer an' more contrary.

At last came an hour when Keevan sat in his high seat an' looked down the long room. An' 'twas none but greybeards he saw.

"What has come to me fightin' men?" says he to Manis, that was wisest o' those in his court.

"'Tis for lovin' Ardanna too well they've fared off in the world to seek forgettin'," says Manis, shakin' his old head.

Keevan stood up in a rage, an' turned to Ardanna, where she sat braidin' a ribbon into her dark hair, an' smilin' to her own thought.

"'Tis wed to a sthrong man ye should have been this many a day past!" he cried, "an' 'tis long enough I've had patience with ye! Now 'tis a task I'll be afther settin', an'



"She sat braidin' a ribbon into her dark hair."

that man who wins through it shall ye wed, be he young or old, warrior or herd boy. Else shall ye serve in field an' kitchen, bringin' wood an' carryin' wather, with none to aid."

Then the laughin' left the eyes of Ardanna. Small wish had she for labourin'; yet anger was overpowerin' all else in her heart, an' at her lips were scornin' words as she glanced at the old men sittin' half sleepin'. Half minded was she to lay aside rich robes an' rare jewels, an' be off to draw wather by the river's shore, stayin' free from marryin'.

A sudden stirrin' came at the outer gate; an' in another stroke o' time two men were standin' within the door o' the great hall o' Keevan Sthrong-arm. Dressed in green they were, an' so like that scarce could any have told one from the other. Each had a bright sword hangin' at his side; an' over their broad shouldhers fell the long, yellow hair, curlin' fine as gold.

Ardanna stood lookin' at them, half fearin'

what might be comin'; but Keevan strode down to greet them.

"'Tis in a good hour ye've come to me roof," says he. "I've somewhat to tell in the ears o' them that choose to hearken, be they friends or foes. Here stands Ardanna, daughter o' mine. Fair to see is she, yet through her folly have many good men gone from me. Hear this word—not given lightly. The hand of Ardanna shall be for him who gathers wild apples an' harvests golden grain in the high valley o' Rinn, an' brings them to me."

The foremost o' the two turned eager to his brother—

"'Tis a quest for us," says he.

"Ay," answered the other, "if it so please the Lady Ardanna."

Wonderin' she was at seein' two men so near like in face an' bearin'.

"An' if ye both win through?" she asked.

"Then shall ye set us another task, an' it may be one afther that. No thought had

we o' provin' strength against each other ; but now must it be seen which of us be the man worthy of Ardanna the wayward."

'Twas red as sundown her cheeks grew at that word, knowin' it well merited ; but Keevan shook with a mighty laugh.

"As ye have said, so shall it be," says he. "An' now what man's men are ye?"

"The men o' no man livin'," says the foremost, "now that Ingri, our father, lives no longer, an' the home of our dwellin' lies wasted with fire. Fionn am I, an' this, at me side, is Fergal. In the same hour were we born ; an' the quest is ours, Keevan Sthrong-arm."

"I have said it," answered Keevan, gruff like. He called servin' men, an' set the two brothers down to great platters o' roasted meat ; an' Ardanna brought stone flagons o' foamin' mead, one to each man. So they ate an' drank like stout heroes, till hunger an' thirst were past.

Up beyant sat Keevan, his chin restin' in

his hand, an' his heavy beard coverin' both like driftin' snow.

"If ye are as like in strength as in face an' body, 'twill be a long day before Ardanna is safe wedded," says he.

"Ay, but Fergal, me brother, has more power of arm than I," says Fionn.

"An' great wisdom has Fionn, beyant aught o' mine," laughed Fergal.

Then Ardanna, sittin' in shadow, saw wherein they differed. For while Fergal, that was more hardy, had eyes laughin' an' eager; Fionn sat ever watchful an' cool, waitin' for what should come. Yet through all else was a lovin' between them that would not be hidin'.

Now the night came on, an' in the great hall was singin' an' harpin'; an' the blaze o' logs on the wide hearth lighted up all around. By Ardanna sat her old nurse, Mor, that knew many things hidden from wise men. An' says Ardanna to her, whisperin'—

"Is there no charm to aid the man who

would gather wild apples in the high valley o' Rinn?"

Mor bent her head, an' thought long. At last she plucked three long hairs from the flowin' locks o' Princess Ardanna.

"Bind them in a sheaf with these, twisted thrice; an' safe will they be brought home to Keevan."

Ardanna glanced round, an' passed careless like across the hall to where sat Fergal. An' while none were noticin', she gave him the three hairs, an' told him the charm, scarce breathin'.

Fergal opened wide eyes.

"An' where is the man can bind apples in a sheaf?" says he; but careful that none should be afther hearin'.

"That I know not," says Ardanna. "'Tis the counsel o' Mor, who sees clear what is hidden from many with great wisdom."

Then Fergal nodded, content an' smilin', an' laid the three hairs, coiled in a ring, in his huntin' pouch. He kissed the little soft hand that had given them; an' Ardanna

thought to herself how a sthrong man would be a safeguard between her and all ills.

In the meantime Keevan Sthrong-arm was talkin' low an' earnest with Manis, that had told him the raison o' many forsakin' him. An' afther much colloquin' he beckoned Fionn to come near. An' says he, lowerin' his voice—

“’Twill take more wisdom nor strength to be mather o' the will o' the wilful. Ill is golden grain to harvest in the high valley o' Rinn. Take ye this little small net o' silk, an' in it ye may bring home what would slip through finer holes.”

Fionn stared at him, mazed like; but wisdom was his not to speak when words served no purpose, an' he gathered the little small net in his hand, an' folded it beneath his belt. An' afther that all went to rest.

When morn began to light the tops o' the eastern hills, Fionn and Fergal stood before the gate o' the tower, with Keevan an' Princess Ardanna, an' all who served their will,

waitin' to see the champions ride on their questin'.

Wilful still was the face o' the girleen that was cause for their goin'; but when at last both kissed her hand, an' rode off lightly to meet the risin' sun, she went to the top o' the tower, an' knelt there on the cold, rough stones, watchin' their goin' till naught could be seen more for the turnin' o' the road.

A long ride was it to the hills, an' hot was the sun as it came up overhead. When the shadows began to turn before them, they saw a tall cliff fornenst them, an' hills risin' ever above it.

"There lies the high valley o' Rinn," says Fionn, musin' to himself.

"An' how may we best reach it?" asked Fergal. "'Tis far an' away over our heads."

"There is but one road," says Fionn, "an' that the cliff-side. Here must we leave our horses, an' climb up how we may, for the honourin' of Ardanna."

So both dismounted, an' tied the weary

horses in the shade, where was runnin' wather near by.

Fionn thought o' the little small net, an' said naught; but Fergal put his hand in his pouch, an' touched the circle o' fine hair. "For honourin' Ardanna!" says he, an' was off swift to the foot o' the cliff. Fionn was ready at his heels, an' up they sprang, leaping across hollows, an' swingin' themselves up by holdin' to the points o' rock.

Once the foot o' Fionn slipped on a loose pebble, an' naught saved his fallin' back but the swift hand an' sthrong o' Fergal, reached out to save. An' again was Fergal nigh to throwin' his full weight on the branch of an ill-rooted bush, but was warned by the sharp cry o' Fionn, his brother.

'Twas a weary sthuggle before they reached the top o' the cliff, but neither could bide seein' his brother laggin' behind without aidin' him; an' as the sun's fire dipped into the western sea, they stood with clasped hands watchin' it sink.

A wild counthry it was above there, with

tangled vines for trippin' their feet, an' thorny bushes for hindherin' goin'.

"Wiser to sleep now, an' start the task by full day," counselled Fionn, an' Fergal nodded; so they rested on the coarse grass, sleepin' sound as in the tower o' Keevan Sthrong-arm.

At the first glint o' dawn they were on their feet, eager an' glowin'.

"Each choose a path," says Fergal, "an' meet here when the sun is fair overhead."

"Well thought," answered Fionn. "Will ye go north or south?"

"Southward is the way o' the wind," says Fergal. "I face it to the north."

"I follow it toward the south," says Fionn; an' they parted, each breakin' way for himself through the bushes.

Now the valley o' Rinn was bound about with higher walls o' rock that no man livin' could pass beyant, an' 'twas o' no great length nor breadth. So just at noon the two brothers came crashin' through the undergrowth, an' met facin'.

“Here is me sheaf o’ golden grain,” says Fergal, pantin’ with the weight o’ the burden. An’ “Here are wild apples for Keevan,” laughed Fionn, droppin’ them on the grass from a fold o’ his cloak.

“Let them lie here,” says Fergal. “None will lay hand on them while ye search for ripe grain, where I found a plenty growin’ to the north; an’ I’ll look to the south for the wild apples growin’.”

“’Tis a wise word,” says Fionn; so not waitin’ for eatin’, or for aught but a sup o’ cold wather from a little sthream that ran down the cliff-side, they parted again, an’ went their ways. An’ ’tis a throe word that never in all the valley o’ Rinn could Fergal come on a tree o’ wild apples; nor for all his searchin’ could Fionn meet with a stalk o’ yellow grain to put in his net. Worn an’ footsore they sat at last in the place where they’d slept, lookin’ each at what his brother had brought.

“A queer task is this,” says Fergal at last. “Aisy what was of it, but little for

our pains. An' to which will Keevan Sthrong-arm give the princess?"

"Time enough for that when we've our harvestin' safe in his tower," says Fionn.

"Ay, but a light matther is the goin' back," laughed Fergal.

"Wait an' see," says Fionn; an' stoopin' together, each took up his burden an' started to climb down the cliff, for no other path was known.

Ill farin' was it; an' before long Fionn gave a sthrange cry. Fergal, lookin' across to him, saw a fearsome sight. The apples, happed up in his cloak, were sendin' up tall shoots o' green, an' branches growin' ever thicker; an' 'twas vain for Fionn to grasp them to him. With a spring, Fergal reached his side, an' catchin' the three hairs from his pouch, twisted them thrice an' threw them in the branches. An' on the instant they were bound together in a sheaf, an' the weight o' them was gone entirely, so that Fionn had no more throuble in gettin' down the rocks.

But now 'twas Fergal's turn to need helpin'. As he grasped the golden grain more firm like, all sudden his feet were tangled with the roots it sent down, an' he stumbled an' nigh went crashin' down to his death.

Fionn, lookin' back, saw his plight, an' for a breath he waited, rememberin' Princess Ardanna. Then he dashed away the evil dhreamin', an' quick as light he drew the net from his belt, flinging it round the sproutin' grain. An' the roots were all caught in; an' Fergal reached the ground below with ne'er a slip afther.

Few words passed between them as they mounted horse an' rode westward; but as they came to the turn in the road, Fionn drew rein, an' Fergal likewise.

"Ardanna should be for ye," says Fionn, "for ye carry her the great sheaf o' golden grain, an' I found ne'er a stalk."

"By yer aid I won it," says Fergal. "An' ye found wild apples where I saw none afther."

“An' would have been over the cliff had ye not aided in time,” says Fionn.

“’Tis fair foolery for us to try rivallin’,” says Fergal, “yet where’s him shall settle it?”

“Wait,” says Fionn. “’Twas Keevan gave me the net that lies across yer grain.”

“An’ ’twas Ardanna’s self laid three hairs in me hand for bindin’ wild apples,” says Fergal.

“Ay, there lies the puzzle solved,” cried Fionn. “Moreover, ’twas in me mind to leave ye without helpin’ on the cliff-side, an’ foul shame would it have been to me. Wherefore is this word a just one. For me was the thought o’ Keevan; but for ye is the heart of Ardanna.”

An’ together they rode to the gate o’ the seaward tower, an’ Fergal carried in the burdens an’ laid them at the feet o’ Keevan; but off into the sunny world rode Fionn, singin’ a gay song—to seek fairer fortune with a light heart—for knowin’ that he had won naught by faithlessness.

VII

KING DIARMID AN' PÒL

VII

KING DIARMID AN' PÒL

[“Be off, now, for I’ll not lave me work waitin’ while I’m rubbin’ me brain to think of old wives’ talk! Betther to let me go out, peaceable like, as Pòl said to King Diarmid, in place o’ holdin’ yer nursery door to kape me in. A—ah, sure an’ ’tis in for it I am, afther that careless word; so sit down, with yer red apples to roast, an’ hearken while I tell ye how it came about.”]

’Twas mighty fond o’ money was King Diarmid. Not for spendin’ it on rich clothin’, or to have a fine place for livin’ in, or to have a grand big army at his beckonin’; but just for sake o’ savin’ it an’ pilin’ it up in his sthrong room—that was the only shpot in all his castle not leakin’

at the roof an' four sides, an' lettin' in rain that aisy.

Sure, so little was he for gettin' the good o' that pile o' gold, that he went abroad in a faded old doublet that was scarce holdin' together, but for bein' mended every day by Queen Dorcha; an' the storms beat in free on the floors o' the old tumble-down castle, where the laste bit o' wind shook the doors an' windows nigh to fallin' in; an' his servin' men an' his soldiers were paid so ill that 'twas scant good he got o' them.

Even his sons went off to far lands to seek fortune, havin' small likin' for stayin' with him an' nigh on starvin' (forbye they went huntin', unbeknownst like, an' roasted their game over a fire o' sticks in the forest). But never a bit matthered all that to King Diarmid, while his pile o' sacks o' money was fillin' his sthrong room half to the rafters, an' the great heavy iron key (the one bit o' shaped iron in the castle not red with rustin') hung safe at his belt, ready for usin' day or night.

Now fine sthrong young men were his sons, an' good at leapin' an' wrestlin' an' fightin' too; an' as long as they were bidin' in that part o' the counthry, none dreamed o' meddlin' with King Diarmid; but when the neighbourin' kings and high chieftains learned that no longer would any o' them stay near his father, an' that Diarmid's fightin' men were growin' fewer each day that dawned, they minded the tales told o' the raison o' that same, an' began to think how pleasin' 'twould be to see his bags o' gold hoppin' into their own keepin'—that would know well how to make better use o' them.

So all looked round to search out good excuses for invadin' his lands; an' before long 'twas every few days some train o' men in armour came riding up to the castle o' Diarmid, wantin' him to pay for some hurt done by his people. An' while Diarmid knew 'twas but shammin' to wring gold from him, yet so scant was his army, an' so full o' discontent, that he dared not threaten resistin', for fearin' he'd need to

pay up his soldiers before they'd be afther fightin' his battles.

He tried puttin' off their claimin' with soft words an' excuses, but ever an' always they came again, an' with more men at their backs, demandin' gold. An' at last came a day when payin' had to be done, whatever came next, for men o' three kingdoms were batterin' at his gates, that would stand but little o' such threatment. Mournin' he was as he sent word for openin' the doors an' lettin' them in; an' a long face was his, as he stood peerin' at a little hole in the wall, watchin' them ridin' away afther, each by his own road, an' carryin' the good gold before them on their saddle-bows.

He locked up the low iron door, an' raged round somethin' fearful, so that poor Queen Dorcha was dreadin' lest her life might go next. When he had made an end o' stravagin' an' dancin' furious up stairs an' down the halls, he went out an' sat at the cross roads talkin' to himself.

“’Tis a beggar I’ll be before me hour!” says he. “An’ me ungrateful sons leavin’ me to be plundered unmerciful like. An’ when those villains o’ King Mahon an’ King Duvan an’ his brother get home an’ tell their masthers that I’ve gold laid up, ’tis no peace o’ me life I’ll be havin’. An’ none to turn to for tellin’ me what to do to get the betther o’ them an’ their plottin’ to rob me.”

Now while he was sittin’ lamentin’ he heard a quare small sound behind him, in the long grass; an’ whippin’ round quick an’ unexpected, he caught sight o’ some-thin’ scarlet slippin’ past him. Sudden as a flash he reached for it; an’ though he lost balance an’ went heels over head off the stone where he’d been perchin’, yet when he picked himself up an’ shook the dust from his old duds, he was still holdin’ on to the bit o’ red, that was a wee small pointed cap.

He looked at it, in an’ outside, as if he was hopin’ to find gold in it; an’ then an odd bit of a voice piped up—

"'Tis me cap o' power ye're squeezin' in yer big awkward hands. Give it to me, or may evil follow ye all the way ye go—sittin' or standin' or goin' an' payin' gold."

This last frightened King Diarmid, an' he looked up from the wee thing, an' there in the dust o' the road stood none other than the king o' the Little People, holdin' out his hand, an' hoppin' from one foot to its mate for eagerness to have his own again. But King Diarmid was crafty, havin' heard much o' what the Little People were able to do.

"What'll ye give me for returnin' it?" asked he.

"Whatever ye've a mind to ask for while I'm afther counting ten," says the little man; an' with that he began — "One! Two! Three!" — an' thru it was that King Diarmid could think o' naught but what had been in his mind the moment before.

"Some one to advise me how to get the betther o' they robbers," he gasped, fearin' that he'd not get the words out

fast enough. But the little king laughed, with somethin' wickeder nor words in the chuckle o' him.

"That I will," says he. "An' a fine counsellor ye'll be afther findin' him. Sure, Pòl is his name; an' advice is the very marrow o' his bones an' the blood o' his body, so don't be usin' him up too fast, an' be left wantin' him."

With that he pulled a wee, tiny dotteen of a man from his own pouch, an' held him up like a doll in his hand.

"Grow bigger!" says he to that same. "Grow bigger! Grow up! Grow up! I'm tellin' ye what's for yer good. Grow up! Grow up!" An' as he spoke, the wee thing began to take on size; an' before King Diarmid's eyes it sudden grew to be as high as the king o' the Little People, an' mighty like him to look at.

"'Twas advice I was givin' him, ye see," says the small king, settin' him down in the road, an' snatchin' his cap. "'Tis that he lives on. But keep him on scant

allowance, cautious like, or he'll mather ye. On the other hand, see that ye don't ask too much o' him at one advisin', an' that ye follow the word he gives." An' the bit king was gone like a puff o' smoke.

King Diarmid quick caught up the little counsellor, an' ran home with him to the castle, an' set him in a corner while he took breath.

"Ye must lodge me in a room where no rain comes in," says Pòl, lookin' round an' here an' there at the broken windows an' the sinkin' rafters, an' at the holes in the roof where the sun was pourin' in.

"But there's none, only me sthrong room," says Diarmid, fearful for his store o' gold pieces.

"Then must ye put me there," says the little man. An' so it had to be.

Now before long, by heedin' the advisin' o' wee Pòl, King Diarmid began to be gettin' even with all his foes, an' his riches grew without disturbin'; for he learned to be afther settin' traps that showed all men





“What shall I do with ye?” he asked, puzzled dreadful.

trespassin' how he was no more to be put upon.

But 'twas careful King Diarmid had to be ; for each time that he asked concernin' somethin', he saw the thing shrink a bit, an' grow less, an' he remembered how the king o' the Little People had warned him. He'd no idea how to help matthers without riskin' makin' him grow too big ; yet 'twas not aisy to keep from gettin' his relief from throubles, an' by reason o' that he noticed, one day, that his small man was but half the size he'd been.

“What shall I do with ye?” he asked, puzzled dreadful.

“Put me out to sit in the middle o' the road,” says Pòl, “an' hearken what comes next.”

So Diarmid carried him out to the cross roads, an' set him down ; an' there he started up howlin', so that all comin' by stopped to look.

“I've hurt me toe!” cried Pòl the counsellor.

"Put it in the runnin' wather," says one.

"Rub it well," says another; an' the one afther had his own way o' curin' bruises with a bit o' cobweb, an' told it to him. An' with each piece of advisin' given him the creature grew fatter an' taller, as it had been somethin' good for eatin'. An' when he was as big as aforetime, King Diarmid lugged him home again to keep company with his bags o' riches, that had grown till they nigh filled the sthrong room.

"'Twas a dish of advice I was needin'," says the wee thing. "Ye'd well nigh starved me for want o' that same."

"An' what kind do ye like?" says Diarmid.

"Any that comes," was the answer. "'Tis all alike it tastes." So whenever the King thought wee Pòl was shrinkin' because o' givin' him too much advice, he ricommended him to tie his shoe, or to brush his coat, or somethin' o' the sort; or talked serious to him about bein' generous; an' he grew right away, an' throve mightily.

Now a time came when his sons turned up at the castle gate for to be afther visitin' their old home. An' Diarmid kept the door o' his money room fast locked, for fear o' their gettin' any, or perhaps makin' friends with Pòl, an' gettin' advice about askin' their father for a few gold pieces.

"'Tis not goin' to do at all, keepin' me shut up in here," says the little man. "Better to let me out."

"Not I," says Diarmid. "I've a wiser plan nor that in me mind."

"Ay, but let me go peaceable," says Pòl.

"Keep ye still," says Diarmid; an' with that word for his supper, the wee man had to be content.

But him that was used to runnin' round the castle at will, took ill to bein' behind bars; an' all King Diarmid could get from him was, "Let me out! let me out!"

Moreover, the sons were beginnin' to be curious about the sthrange thing that squealed in beyant; an' asked more questions than Diarmid found comfortin'.

There came a night when thunder rumbled an' growled at a great rate ; an' the lightnin' was amazin' bright. But when King Diarmid went in for his good-night peep at the little man, all he could spy was a small dark thing perched on the bags, up in a corner.

"I advise ye solemnly to let me out o' here, or ye'll repent it!" says the small voice of him.

"When me sons is gone," answered Diarmid, not even offerin' him advice on bein' silent, but goin' out again an' fastenin' the door. An' he an' his family sat down to what supper there was.

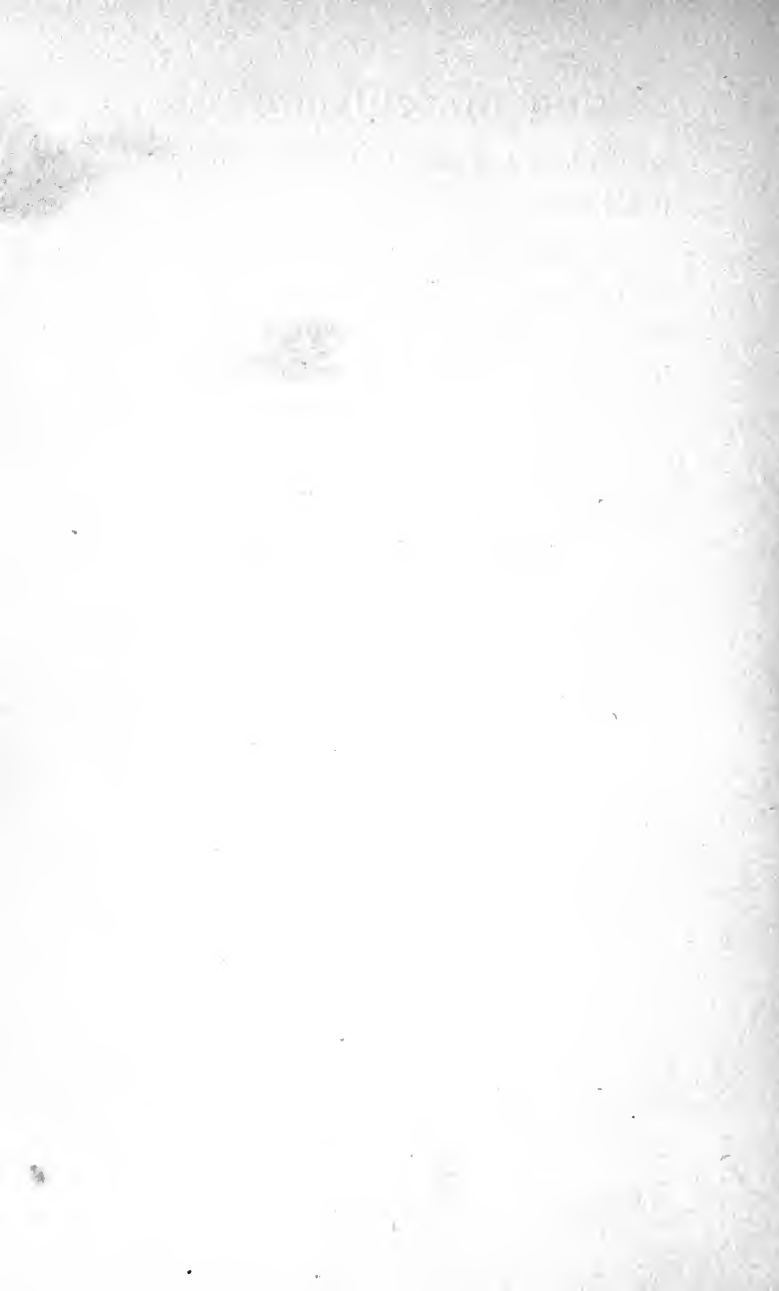
An' now began a terrible racketin', drownin' the roarin' o' thunder, an' the dhrippin' o' rain on their supper table, by that same token. 'Twas "Let me out!" in a big voice first ; then "Let me out!" in one fainter, till with it all ye'd ha' thought each stone in the cracked old castle was shoutin' to get out of its lodgin'. Hard work had Diarmid to hold his sons from searchin' to see what

was wrong ; but at last the squealin' ceased, an' all was quiet.

But when—that very next morn's mornin'—Diarmid went to speak with his counsellor, sure, not a shadow o' Pòl was to be found in any chink ; for he'd done naught less than squealin' advice to King Diarmid to let him go free, till he'd squealed himself—body an' clothes an' small red nose—away into nothin' at all, an' never was he seen more.

[“ And King Diarmid had to take care of his money all alone ? ”

“ Ay, sure ; an' ye'll know now what they mean when ye hear them sayin' that a man shrinks from givin' advice. So be off while there's enough o' me left to tend to me weedin'.”]



VIII

FAIR AILINN

VIII

FAIR AILINN

[“Hark, now, at the cowld wind blowin’,
the night! ’Tis fine an’ thankful yees
should be feelin’ to be in warm shelter,
an’ not wandherin’ abroad. Sit there
by the fire, an’ roast yer nuts peaceable
like, while I’m afther tellin’ yees what
happened once, on a night as like this
as the two eyes in yer faces.”]

Ay, ’twas a night worse nor this, that the
wind came howlin’ an’ bringin’ the snow
down from the mountains an’ pilin’ it at
the gates o’ Breogan the Red. But little
cared he for what the wind might be doin’.
’Twas chieftain over the men o’ Lough Derg
he was, an’ his house was sthrong built o’
hewn oak; an’ while the roof was but low,

the buildin' was well shielded round with walls of earth, like a fort.

In by a fine roarin' fire sat Breogan the Red—though by that same token 'twas no longer red, but white with years his hair was grown. An' near him, at the feet o' one spinnin', sat Aongas, his son, carvin' a cup for dhrinkin' from a bit o' wood, while the men an' maids went about their workin'. Breogan was dhreamin' o' fightin' long past, an' Aongas bent over his carvin', but ever an' often they turned to look at Fair Ailinn, as she stood in the glow o' the flames, dhrawin' the thread o' white wool from her distaff.

Afther a bit she began to sing, an' so sweet was that same that only one o' the maids heard a low knockin' at the outer gate. She stole out, quiet like, to find who was there—an' without stood an old man, carryin' a harp, an' seemin' nigh perishin' with the cowl. She signed him to pass into the hall, while she barred the gate behind him; so alone he came to the door-

way an' stood watchin' Fair Ailinn with hungry eyes. Never one looked up till he said—

“Save all here.”

Then all eyes turned to him, an' Ailinn, puttin' down distaff an' spindle, came forward an' led him to the fire, an' took his tattered old cloak, hangin' it to dhry. She bid a servin' maid bring him meat an' dhrink, an' not till he was warmed an' fed did any ask whither he came.

“'Tis a singer without a name I am,” says he to Breogan, “an' a wandherer over the land to seek the one whose touch on me harp shall bring me me heart's desire.”

“An' what may that be?” asked Aongas, lookin' up with fearless eyes like a young eagle; but the old man shook his head an' answered naught.

“Have ye music in yer harp for us to hear?” asked Breogan.

“Ay,” says the man—and sthruck so loud an' clear a note that all ears were listenin' for what might follow. Then, of a sudden

like, he broke into a war song, with the clash o' swords in every line—singin' so sthrong an' fierce that Aongas sprang to his feet with eyes flashin' as he had seen battle nigh.

“Too rare a singer ye are to be wanderin' in storm an' sleet,” says Breogan. “Stay here while ye will.” An' Fair Ailinn brought him a great horn o' mead.

Then he swept the sthrings again, an' 'twas a lament for warriors fallen in battle, an' the keenin' o' women was never so sad as that same. An' Breogan shaded his face with his hand, not carin' to let any see how he was feelin'.

Now afther a time the harper rested from playin', an' sat on the bench by the fire, leanin' his harp on his knee. An' says Aongas—

“Why for have ye no head carved on the pillar o' yer harp? 'Tis naught but a shapeless block.”

“For that I have not found me heart's desire,” says he. “But old I'm growin',

an' no longer shall it be without form. Give me leave to carve on it the head o' yer fair daughter, Breogan, son o' Cennedigh."

"Leave have ye, though no child o' mine is she save in lovin'. The light o' me house has she been since the day when I found her lyin' sleepin', a lost birdeen, on the shores o' Lough Derg." An' Breogan laid his hand on her hair—like floss o' black silk it was—as she knelt by him. An' she looked up, with love in her smilin'. Then the old harper caught the gravin' knife from the hand of Aongas.

"Bide as ye are, Fair Ailinn, till I've the image o' yer face carven out," he cried; an' all in the hall pressed nigher to see what he would do.

An' while Aongas was betther nor many at the shapin' o' wood an' horn an' bone, yet he could do naught to compare with this. As they stood gazin', the very face o' Fair Ailinn seemed to grow from out the block o' wood, even to the soft curl on her fair forehead, an' the shinin' jewel in her ear.

Aongas looked long, an' turned away sore against his will; but the hour had come when 'twas his care to watch at the gate till morn, an' he went out to his post.

"Rare skill ye have, harper without a name," says Breogan, "an' if gold can buy the work o' yer hands, 'tis for ye to name yer price."

"Wait," answered the harper. "Wait an' hearken."

Then as they strained their ears for listenin', came tremblin' on the air a sound soft as the singin' o' Fair Ailinn, or the rustle o' wind in the deep o' the ferns. An' the men an' maids ceased their comin' an' goin', an' sank speechless on the benches round the hall; an' Breogan nodded drowsy like—an' the head o' Fair Ailinn drooped lower, restin' on his knee—an' all under the roof, forebye the harper himself, were too heavy in sleep for dhreamin'.

One last note he touched, an' up rose Fair Ailinn, her sweet eyes fast closed, an' came toward him like a white mist blown across



"Came towards him,"



runnin' wather. The face o' the harper was full o' wild triumphin'.

"Gold first," he cried. "Give it in me hands!"

He pushed the harp so that her soft fingers rested on the strings, an' as a note wavered, there were his withered old hands heaped with shinin' money.

"'Tis me heart's desire!" he shouted, knowin' that none could wake to hear. He lifted the harp, an' stepped backward toward the door, playin' a song so wild an' so strange that Fair Ailinn followed, ever nigher to that harp whose head was like the shadow o' her own in the dyin' firelight, till in a breath she vanished, and naught remained but the image. Quick the old man threw his ragged cloak round him, took the harp on his shouldher, an' went out to the gate, where stood Aongas, watchin' in the night an' dark.

"'Tis not goin' out ye are!" says the lad.

"Ay," says the harper. At sight o' his face Aongas fell back, for the gate was

swingin' open before him without help o' hand, an' before he knew it the old man was out an' away. At that same moment the snow ceased fallin', an' when the moon shone from behind a cloud, no man was to be seen.

Aongas thought strange of it, an' after watchin' an' wondherin', he felt it right to go in an' speak o' the matter to Breogan. An' there, heavy in sleep, lay Breogan, an' round him the men an' maids, an' no touch o' his could rouse any there. He went to the room o' Fair Ailinn, but the door stood open, an' none within. He ran through house an' hall, an' without in the courtyard, but ne'er a footprint was in the snow, barrin' his own an' the old harper's. Nowhere was sign o' Fair Ailinn, an' he knew that she had been stolen away.

Only half knowin' what he was doin', he caught up sword an' cloak, an' rushed out to follow the track o' the harper in the snow. Through the night he pushed on swiftly, past the little Lough, an' over the hills,

goin' ever westward toward the old sea. Never a sight had he o' livin' mortal, though the bright o' the moon showed him the print o' feet that seemed never to weary. But the very wind blowin' on his back seemed helpin' Aongas forward, an' when morn came, he was near a half-ruined, dark, old castle, on a crag overlookin' Mal Bay, where the winter waves were beatin' up on the shore. The marks led to a closed gate, but he waited for a breath before beatin' at it. An' in that moment he spied a bit of a fisher's hut, far down the shore, an' he thought it wise to ask there for word o' Fair Ailinn an' the old harper.

A frightened bit of a lass stood in the door, an' shook her head at his questionin'.

“’Tis never more ye’ll see her if she’s been stolen away by Oisin, son o’ Lua,” whispered she. “’Tis a terrible sorcerer he is, an’ five hunderd year has he lived in that castle, with ne’er a stone fallen or a hinge rusted beyant what it was when he first went in at the door. That which he has

desired has he played on his harp, an' there before him would be the thing he willed to have. But in these days much o' that power has gone from him, for his wicked doin's. Sleep, an' rule over wind an' wather are his; but the gold that he loves, an' the renewin' o' his wicked life, must be played for him by a fair maid with true love in her heart. For that will he have stolen Fair Ailinn, an' hidden her where none can free her save that man who has no fearin' in his heart; an' where's he who fears not Oisin?"

Aongas laughed, with eyes sparklin' like the risin' sun on the sea. "No fear o' livin' man have I," says he. "Give me a fisher's coat in place o' me cloak, an' ashes to darken me face, an' we shall see what will come o' the power o' Oisin."

So the fisher lass helped him to change his looks, an' Breogan his father would not have known him for the fine young warrior he'd seen leavin' the hall to guard the gate. An' up to the castle of Oisin he went an' knocked boldly. Aftther some

waitin' the harper opened, an' already he seemed younger nor before.

"What's yer will?" asked he.

"Me boat is wrecked on the rocks," says Aongas, "an' no way o' gainin' me livin' have I. Give me work, an' naught but food will I ask in return."

Now Oisín was weary o' the work o' carryin' away an' storin' the gold that Fair Ailinn had played for him, an' little thinkin' he beckoned the lad to enter, knowin' that all fishers along that coast knew well an' feared the breath o' his name—knowin' his power over wind an' wather, by reason o' his magic harpin'.

"Carry these bags to the tower beyant," says he, "while I sleep. An' afther I'll give ye yer food."

Within, Aongas saw a long, dark hall, with naught o' furnishin' save a wooden settle, an' a dusty, broken harp by it.

"Never lay hand on that," says Oisín, followin' his look. "If ye do, 'twill vanish, an' yer life will be mine in payment."

Aongas nodded, pretendin' to be frightened at the thought ; but his heart leaped, for on the pillar o' the harp he saw the likeness o' Fair Ailinn. So Oisin showed him where to carry the bags o' money, an' watched him a bit as he toiled up the tower stair to the sthrong room—then went back to the hall an' lay down on the bench, shammin' sleepin'. But he had a quare thought that within the fisherman's eyes was no real fear o' him, an' danger to his heart's desire lay in that same, so he waited for Aongas to come down to try him.

An' as the lad bent for a heavy sack, there was a terrible barkin', an' he saw the whole hall filled with fierce dogs, comin' at him to tear him. Aongas looked at them, careless like, though two had teeth in his coat, an' shook Oisin by the shouldher o' him.

“Call off yer beasts,” says he. “’Tis loath I am to harm them.” An' there was a ring in his voice not like that of a fisher lad. Oisin mutthered a word, an' the hall was clear ; but still he seemed sleepin'.

When Aongas came down the stair again, he made but a step on the floor, an' sudden like it was slidin' away from under his feet, an' all the walls waverin' as if to fall an' crush him. Quick as a flash he gave a spring an' landed on top o' Oisin; an' at that all was as before. An' the ashes fell from his face, an' Oisin knew him; but no word he spoke, thinkin' that Aongas might as well finish the carryin' o' the treasure before bein' killed for followin'.

The third time came Aongas, when 'twas growin' toward night, an' all the sacks o' gold were stored, an' his service ended. An' as he bent to speak, great flames burst in through all the windows an' doors, an' no way o' gettin' out. Aongas saw Oisin disappear from the bench where he'd been lyin', like a shadow afther sunset, an' he knew that this last happenin' was no jestin', for the heat grew ever fiercer; but still was no fearin' in his heart. Lastly his eye fell on the harp. A faint tremblin' sound came from it, an' the thought o' seein' the face o' Fair Ailinn,

though 'twas but carved in wood, made black an' charred by fire, was more nor he could dhream o' lettin' come to pass.

"Betther to see the harp vanish, than that," says he, reckless. "Oisin can do no more nor take me life from me, be it by fire or sorcery."

He caught the harp on his arm, an' sthruck ringin' music from it. An' as it echoed up into the smoky rafters, of a sudden the fire was gone, an' in the dark stood Aongas, with Fair Ailinn clasped close to him, an' the wind blowin' cold from the sea. The moon shone in at a high window, an' on the floor lay the cloak o' Oisin. Aongas lifted it to wrap about Fair Ailinn, an' there, beneath, was all that ever men saw more o' Oisin son o' Lua. An' a little heap o' dust was that same. Sure, five hunderd years had he worked ill for his own pleasure; an' when his enchantin' went against him, the years came back.

"A good endin', that, for all who work evil," says Aongas. Catchin' up Fair Ailinn, he sprang down to the gate, which stood

swingin' in the moon shadows as the wind blew, for the bars were naught but heaps o' rust in their sockets.

"'Tis for home we're bound," laughed he, with a light heart.

Now throe it is that when they reached the house o' Breogan the Red, all lay as Aongas had left them, sleepin' this way an' that; an' none roused till Fair Ailinn laughed an' sang with gladness at bein' there once more.

Breogan sat up an' rubbed his eyes.

"'Tis dhreamin' o' dhreamin' I've been," says he, "but I've woke in time for a weddin'."

An' to the last day of all there, none knew that they had lost a day an' a night from their lives.

["And was the old man never heard of again?"]

"Never no more, for he blew away entirely. If ye doubt me word, go to Mal Bay, an' see what a power o' dust lies on the shore to this day."]



IX

THE SERVIN' O' CULAIN



IX

THE SERVIN' O' CULAIN

[“Nay, nay, then. An end to yer chatter. Never a man learned his lessons by sittin' down an' paintin' a picture o' the teacher; an' 'tis never a bridge ye'es will be afther crossin' by dhreamin' o' what's on the other side. 'Tis hard work that counts, in the end. Hear now!”]

'Twas Culain was youngest son to King Ciad; an' fonder he was o' lyin' on the cliffs an' hearkenin' to the beatin' o' the waves, or o' the harpin' an' singin' in the hall, than o' battlin' an' strife. Yet all was not from wantin' strength an' skill, but for lackin' raison for tryin' them.

Fine sthrong men were his two brothers, an' good at the sword-play, an' had scant patience with Culain for his aisy-goin' ways.

Yet was there throe lovin' between them, an' many a time they shielded him from the wrath o' King Ciad. However, at last an' at length he got an inklin' o' what like his youngest son was gettin' to be, an' one mornin' he called the three to him.

"'Tis thinkin' o' sharin' me kingdom between the three o' yeas I am," says he, "bein' as I'm growin' old. But first I'd be afther knowin' what each o' yeas has done to show himself a man worthy o' rulin' men."

Well now, they looked at each other, not bein' boastful warriors, but either waitin' for his brother to speak before him.

"What now?" says old King Ciad, lookin' up expectin' under his white brows.

Then spoke up Firbis, that was eldest: "When me brother Ingri was attacked by the men o' Torcal the Dane, he fought his way out, five to one, an' reached home by wadin' the rapids in season to warn us. An' bitter cold was the wather on his wounds."

Then Culain says, eager like: "When the wild boar came nigh to killin' me, 'twas

Firbis thrust the spear into his throat, never fearin' for himself. An' he outwitted the men o' the North Isles, capturin' their long ships when they were ashore, an' hindherin' them from burnin' the dûn."

"An' what has Culain done to be deservin' his share?" asked King Ciad. "Has none a good word for him, nor tale of a brave deed?"

"Sthrong of arm is he," says Firbis, slow o' speech, "an' can sing songs o' battle an' tell rare tales o' heroes."

"What use the sthrong arm when 'tis put to no good purpose?" says the King. "Is that the best ye have to tell?"

"Nay," says Ingri. "But yester-morn he drew Donncha, the groom, from a deep pit where he had lain, bruised, through the night, an' brought him in on his shouldher; an' many a load o' fagots has he carried through the forest to the hut o' Bethoc, that was his nurse."

But Culain stood silent.

"A servin' man could well have done

as much," says Ciad. "No part o' this kingdom o' mine is for one who has done naught to win it. What king would marry his daughter to a sluggard?"

Then the hot blood leapt to the face o' Culain.

"Sluggard shall ye name me no longer!" he cried. "A princess will I win for me own, an' bring her to share me birthright; or if ye will, give the kingdom to Firbis an' Ingri, an' a kingdom o' me own will I conquer, or die tryin'."

"Well spoken," answered the old king, hidin' the gladness that warmed his heart at the words o' the lad. "But as I say, so shall it be. Take a sword, an' what horse ye choose; an' a purse with ten gold pieces will I give to ye; and then be off into the world to seek yer fortune an' learn what it means to be o' the blood o' kings. A year an' a day, an' two days more I give ye, to prove that ye've the heart of a brave man, an' to win yer right to a third o' me lands."

So Culain took his sthrong sword, an' the purse from his father's hand, an' went down to get a horse to ride. An' there in the stable stood Bethoc, the crone that had been nurse to his mother before him.

"'Tis out in the world ye're goin'," says she, leanin' on her staff.

"Ay," says Culain, stout like.

"Then give me a promise before ye mount. For though they may call ye slug-gard, yet have ye learned o' me one thing that is above buyin' in battle—that the word of a king's son can be neither bent nor broken."

"Have yer promise, then, for that wise lesson," says Culain, waitin' patient for what she should ask.

"Then 'tis that ye heed an' remember an' obey the words I'm afther speakin' to ye now. Hearken, Culain, son o' King Ciad. 'Tis through servin' ye'll gain skill an' power that could come to ye in no other way; an' through that same ye'll at last reach the road for winnin' the good

that's comin' to ye if yer heart fails not. Hold fast to yer word once given, an' set yer hand to naught without carryin' it through. Mindin' that, all will go well in the end, though it seem blacker nor storm in winter. Me word is said."

Then Culain dhropped the silken purse in her withered hand.

"Ye'll be needin' it more nor meself," says he; an' from a stall he took the best horse that offered. Then, with a wave o' the hand to the ones watchin' at the gate, he rode away into the deep forest, with the words o' Bethoc runnin' ever an' all the time in his mind.

For many an hour he held on his way, never seein' livin' thing (forbye 'twas the birds singin' in the branches, or a roe deer leapin' up the mountain side), till he came to a deep valley, far from the sea. An' there he came on a low hut, built o' boughs; an' before it two men sittin', fishin' in a little small sthream that ran by, convenient like. Torn an' tattered lookin' they were,

but not seemin' to mind aught, or be shamed by their quare looks.

"Save all here," says Culain, dismountin' and stoopin' to dhrink the runnin' wather.

"'Tis welcome ye are," says the first ragged man, pullin' up a little fish. When the second fellow saw it wrigglin' on the hook, he dhropped his own line, an' they fell to throwin' dice to see which should have it. An' Culain had never seen that done at all.

"Who are ye?" he asked, wondherin'.

"Jolly beggar-men," says the first. "Taig am I; an' this, me fellow, is Derg o' the Mill, bein' dhriven out o' one for not workin'."

"An' what sort o' playin' is that ye're afther?" asked Culain, ever one to be aisy led from his purpose, an' forgettin' what errand he rode on.

"Thry it an' see, if ye've aught worth stakin'," laughed Derg o' the Mill. "'Tis rare sport ye'll find it, an' well suitin' a fine lad like yerself."

Culain, willin' to learn, sat down on the green bank, an' began throwin' dice with the two beggar-men, stakin' what he had against the small triflin' things they played for, till luck left him entirely. Sure, first thing he knew, the horse was Taig's, an' Derg o' the Mill was flourishin' the fine sword he'd won.

"We'll be afther sellin' them quick, to the first that comes passin' by," says Derg.

"Wait," says Culain. "Is there no way for me to get them again? Ill honour is it to me for losin' them."

"Have ye naught else to stake?" asked Taig.

"Nay," says Culain, "an' no more would I risk if I had. An evil day is this wherein I'm afther meetin' yees."

"Ay, but wait," says Taig. "Three beggar-men are we now, an' may do great things as any king's son, if we fare out into the world together. Will ye buy back yer horse with six months o' servin' us?"

“That will I,” answered Culain, “an’ me sword with other six.”

“Done,” says Derg. “An’ I’ll cast in the bargain the teachin’ o’ ye how to wile singin’ birds, an’ what else I know; an’ Taig ’ll give ye the word that makes flowers bloom where ’tis spoken. An’ in the end ye may amount to somethin’ worthy o’ makin’ a third in our company, an’ thraivelin’ with us where we go.”

So poor Culain, shamed to tell them how he was a king’s son seekin’ fortune an’ a princess, served the two beggar-men, dhrawin’ wather an’ buildin’ the fire an’ roastin’ meat. Many a time he’d have given much to slip away by night an’ off to freedom, but bound by his given word he was, both to the beggar-men that had won his horse an’ sword, an’ to Bethoc. So he bent to his labourin’ with a will, every day growin’ sthronger an’ more active; an’ many a thrick o’ cunnin’ sword-play he learned o’ Derg, that had been a fightin’ man till he grew too lazy. An’ Taig, that had given

up bein' a blacksmith to take to beggin', showed him many a strange way o' managin' horses.

An' as the days went on, Culain asked many a time if they were never goin' out in the world to win honour, an' always they promised that 'twould be on the next day comin' they'd be off; but the day never came at all, for there was always more throwin' o' dice, or some one stoppin' beside the road for gossipin', or some rare good cause for puttin' off actin' like men. An' Culain was fair distracted from bein' so restless—havin' to stay servin' beggar-men when great deeds were doin' out beyant. Yet ever the counsel o' Bethoc came in his mind, an' for the pride o' him he'd not take back the word once given.

“Why not be takin' things aisy, like us?” Taig would say. “'Tis as good as bein' kings, an' not half the throuble, sittin' here an' lettin' life go on, without frettin' our minds about what matthers.” But Culain was fast learnin' different; though ne'er a

word came from him as to his bein' a prince.

Now 'twas nigh on the end o' the twelfth month o' his servin', when one passed bearin' news.

"'Tis from the court o' King Murtagh I come," says he, "where lives a fair maid, daughter o' the king's brother, Donal, that was slain in the great battle o' the White Ford. Morna, Love o' Sunshine, they call her. An' much talkin' o' gold an' silver, an' buyin' an' bargainin' has she heard in the court o' Murtagh (who would make a betther merchant nor leader in battle, by that same token), till from dislikin' to that has she sworn to wed none save him who shall bring her the gift which no gold nor silver can buy. An' King Murtagh holds her to that, sayin' that that man shall she sure wed, be he plain servin' lad or one o' high degree. An' her a right king's daughter! Ay, but 'tis some thrickery lies under all, to me mind. 'Twill be aisy sayin' 'Take her,' but I'm thinkin' that man 'll be

needin' to ride with drawn sword, or never will he win free from the gates."

"Oho!" says Taig, seein' the man ridin' on his way afther speakin', "'tis to the court o' King Murtagh we'll be goin'. Maybe we'll get a princess for wife to one of us, an' never need to work more. An' for his talk o' thrickery, 'twas but to put us off the thrack." An' Derg agreed—grinnin' with his ugly face.

So they had Culain pack up what goods there were, an' tie them in a bundle to carry on his shouldher; an' he followed on foot where they two rode on the horse. An' much he thought to himself, but said naught, knowin' that one day more would set him free o' them, an' eager to be off an' doin' man's deeds.

When they rode into the outer court o' King Murtagh's dwellin', there, standin' in a doorway, was Princess Morna; an' Love o' Sunshine was she, for on her sweet head it shone like the rare gold. When Culain set eyes on her, 'twas as if fire had leapt



“There, standin’ in a doorway, was Princess Morna.”

into his heart, an' he cast his burden far from him, in the hour o' his freedom, scornin' the touch of it. But all around were laughin' at the look o' the beggar-men, an' many stout warriors gathered nigh.

Dread o' bein' forced to wed one o' these beggar-men was in the heart o' Morna, but she raised her head bravely, an' called on Taig to show his gift. So he knelt down and whispered a word, an' there on the hard trodden earth o' the court bloomed many gay flowers.

"Go ye within an' wait," says Morna, "while I see yer companions."

So Taig entered the door, feelin' sure o' triumphin'; an' one who had a secret word from the princess brought him a horn o' sthrong mead.

"'Tis no use at all," whispered the servin' man. "Betther nor that gift has been brought before. But I'll give a gold piece to know the word, for pleasurin' me sweet-heart." An' Taig, greedy-like, clutched the gold an' told it. An' at once he was flung

out at the little back gate, among the swineherds.

Next came Derg, leavin' Culain holdin' his horse an' carryin' the sword, forgettin' that the time o' servin' was up. An' Derg whistled—an' from the sky came a hundred singin' birds, twitterin' as in early spring-time. So then Morna, fearin' his looks worse nor the other, sent him in afther. An' when he had dhrunk mead, it went with him as with Taig, for he sold his secret, thinkin' that he'd no chance o' winnin' Morna whatever—an' was pushed stumblin' out among the pigs.

Last of all Morna looked up an' saw Culain, standin' poorly dressed, but proud an' well to look on.

"Have ye also a gift that no gold can buy?" says she, half tremblin', an' wonderin' at his differin' so from Taig an' Derg.

"Ay," says Culain.

"An' what?" says Morna.

"'Tis the throe love of a king's son," says he. Right quick he caught the gladness

fillin' her eyes; an' never waitin' for askin', he sprung to the saddle, swung her up before him, an' headed for the outer gate.

“’Tis the beggars’ servant stealin’ the princess!” shouted those round, tryin’ to catch the bridle—but a word to the horse was all that was needed. An’ though many a stout fightin’ man drew sword an’ spear to stay them, Culain was too swift an’ skilled with thrust and parry—an’ before any thought to bar the gate, he had cut his path out over warrior an’ servin’ man, an’ was ridin’ like the wind over the moorland an’ through the forest. An’ never did he draw rein till he reached the castle o’ Ciad, an’ claimed the kingdom due.

An’ happy he lived all his life with Morna, Love o’ Sunshine, each havin’ that gift which no gold could buy, an’ blossomin’ flowers an’ the singin’ o’ birds at their will, summer an’ winter.

[“An’ that’s how the son o’ Ciad learned the throe worth o’ bein’ a right king.”]



X

HOW CORMAC LOST HIS KINGDOM



X

HOW CORMAC LOST HIS KINGDOM

[“ Another? An’ one with fightin’ in it? Ah—h, now, ’tis little small girls should take shame for likin’ to hear o’ such matters! Not but what there was a power o’ battlin’ in those days; an’ men strivin’ to see which was sthronger, an’ often settin’ crafty wits against stouter arms nor their own. Wait, now, while I tell yees how King Cormac was afther losin’ his kingdom.”]

CORMAC o’ Straight Words they called him, for ’twas never a lie nor a thrick he’d stand from any that came in his way; an’ he’d never shrink back from his word once given. ’Twas ruler of a fine share o’ the land he was, lyin’ well up to the north o’ the Sea o’ Moyle. An’ by that raison his coasts

were aisy an' open to the long ships o' the Northmen, that came from the islands over an' toward the mainland. How an' ever 'twas, though, there'd never been a time when he'd not beaten them off an' them glad o' their lives to get away.

A gran' sthrong man he was, an' ever in the foremost where throuble was brewin'; an' then 'twas "look out!" for other men (though never was Cormac known to harm one weaker nor himself by way o' showin' his power).

An' three fine lads he had,—right sons o' his house, barrin' they were not yet grown to age for handlin' bow nor spear. But well were they afther showin' the marks o' the race they came of, that was bold warriors clear back to nobody knows—an' the times o' Fin-mac-Cool—not alone through Cormac, but by way o' Muireall, their mother, that was no more livin'.

Now when all had been quiet an' peaceable along the coasts for a year or two, an' all in the land was thrivin', word came in on

the wind that Haco, the fiercest chief o' the Northmen, was gatherin' a great fleet, filled with armed fightin' men, to win Cormac's rich kingdom an' hold it for himself. An' great preparin' to meet him there was, an' gatherin' o' warriors from far off.

Sure, Cormac made scant doubt o' dhrivin' them back like straws blowin' before the tempest; yet for care o' the chancin' o' war he sent the three sons o' him, that was wild already to stay by him through the battle, far south to a little huntin' lodge by the Lough o' the Eagle, where neither Dane or man o' the North Islands knew the road to follow; thinkin' himself free to fight sthronger with them out o' reach.

An' a great campin' place was made on the plain above the sea, an' watchers a many had piles o' wood laid for firin' on the hill-tops, to give word o' the comin' o' the Northmen if 'twas by night. Then Cormac, seein' that all was ready an' in wait, swore a sthrong vow on his sword, an' sent word o' that same to Haco, by a sure messenger.

For three days an' three more came wind from the south, an' no word o' the Northmen. Sure, 'twas fair reckless Cormac was growin', for weariness o' waitin'; an' bein' unable to take sleepin' aisy, there came an hour o' the night when he wandhered up over the downs an' into the forest, near to the Glen o' Yew Trees. An' few men o' those parts cared to be neighbour to that same, knowin' it for the home o' the Little People, an' dreadin' the wrath an' punishin' o' Cormac, that had made pact with them that no man o' his should be afther disturbin' them by day or night.

So Cormac, fearin' naught, was walkin' slow under the trees, keepin' ever a ready ear for any stirrin', when sudden before him glimmered a wee light, an' there on the brown pine needles strewin' the ground before him stood the Little Green King, noddin' to him in greetin'.

"'Tis yer friend I am, Cormac," says he, "an' 'tis wise ye'll be to heed the counsellin' I've in me heart for ye; for if ye scorn it,

evil will come in an hour that's on its road to ye, an' evil that no power o' mine may ward from ye."

"Can we not beat off all that come by strength of our own arms, then?" asked Cormac, brave-hearted whatever happened.

"Ay, when the time is ripe," says the Little Green King. "But evil is in the wind that is turnin' from south to north before its right hour—bringin' the ships o' Haco in the days when fortune an' the trolls may be afther favourin' them. Sure, for two days in each year the power o' the Little People goes from them, an' their goodwill profits naught to their friends till those hours be passed. Hearken to me, Cormac, father an' son o' kings. Ye've sworn a pact with me, that none o' yer people shall speak ill o' mine, or harm our grass rings in the deep o' the forest, or dig about our mounds; an' well have ye kept that same."

"Ay," says Cormac, "that have I done, an' will while life is in me, for throe friend

o' mine have ye been—sendin' harvest better nor any in lands far or near, an' fair days an' sunshine. An' when 'twas rare huntin' I was afther wantin', the deer an' wild fowl were fair eager to run an' fly in me path."

An' again he gave his word, swearin' on the crossed staff an' serpent.

Then says the Little Green King: "For that shall ye keep favour o' the Little People, whether yer kingdom last or fall from ye. An' for that do I give ye wise counsel, that may save all yet. Wait ye in the forest, dhrawin' yer men into hidin' in the glens for but two days, an' let the Northmen search as they will, growin' careless. In the third day shall ye rise an' dhrove them into the sea; an' victory shall ye have, that none callin' them kin shall dare come afther for revengin'."

"Nay," says Cormac, "that is ill counsel to a king an' a warrior. On the shore will I meet with Haco, come he by night or day, in fair sunlight or grey tempest."

"'Tis but waitin' for the third day, an' masthery sure afther," says the Little Green King.

"'Tis but breakin' me word given," says Cormac. An' for all the persuadin' talk o' the little man, no other answer would he give.

Then says the little king, seein' that naught would move him whatever: "Hear me last word, Cormac, that may soon be without a kingdom. Do no ill to the ships o' Haco till ye have him conquered by land. While they lie on the shore the Danes will know that there's a way o' retreatin' open, an' they may take it an' fly when Haco is never thinkin'. But if the ships be burned an' broken, then will the fury o' madmen an' the power o' the trolls come in their blood, an' none can resist their onsettin'. An' no strength will I have to aid ye in that hour."

"'Tis no aid I'm askin'," says Cormac.

"Then on ye I lay three *geasa*," says the Little Green King (an' those same were

spells that Cormac couldn't help obeyin'). "First, that ye suffer no man save free-born warriors in yer camp. Second, that ye carry in yer belt these three darts, keepin' them for the hour when the battle turns against yees. 'Twas forged by Lén they were, an' under the rainbow were they tempered, that no armour can stay them. A score o' men shall fall where one flies. Use two as need comes, but hold back the third for yer darkest hour, ever mindin' that 'tis the last, an' none to follow afther. An' the third is this, Cormac that scorns aidin', that ye sthrip the jerkin from the first man ye kill, an' wear it above yer own."

With that word he was gone from seein', like the starlight glimmer on a knife, an' Cormac, grippin' fast the three darts o' Lén, hastened back to his men, seein' far in the sky to the north the light o' the burnin' signals. An' before night was gone, he had sent far from his camp all that were not warriors born o' free blood.

Now as day came out o' the dark, down the north-east wind came rushin' the long ships o' Haco, with black sails showin' far against the white foamin' waves, an' shields glitterin' along the sides o' them. An' right at the shore they headed, dhrivin' far up on the sand with the risin' tide.

Then, with a great cryin' out, Cormac an' his men swept down along the cliff-side, the sun glistenin' on their bronze armour an' rich torcs o' gold, an' the ash shafts whirrin' ahead to let Haco know what was comin'. Sure, the battle-axes swung under the blue o' the cold sky, an' there was clashin' o' swords an' spears, an' wild strugglin' for mastery up an' down the sand, where none heeded the splashin' o' waves about their feet, nor the tanglin' o' the salt grass.

An' from the first man slain by Cormac, he sthripped the green coat that he wore, never carin' for the wondherin' o' those nigh, but puttin' it on over his armour; an' all through the fightin' the sight of it made the men o' Cormac wild for followin'.

As dark dhrew on, the Danes an' men o' the islands were forced back across the bulwarks o' their ships for shelter; an' Cormac, with his warriors (an' fresh they were still, for all the heat o' their fightin'), went back to the shadow o' the cliffs an' built fires for the night. But Cormac set watchers to see that no surprise came to those sleepin', an' himself kept guard, foremost of all, knowin' Haco an' his men to be full o' cunnin' not to be thought light of. Yet had he feelin' o' triumphin' because he'd beaten them back without aidin' from the Little People, for all the Danes outnumbered his own men.

An' that no plannin' o' his should go strayin', he called aside Cogoran an' Duach, that were chiefs under him, tellin' them the words o' the Little Green King. An' they three shaped out together how the battle should be at the hour o' dawn, catchin' the men o' Haco asleep. An' while the words were still in the air, there came a rustlin' o' dead leaves behind a great oak, that had

fallen in a winter storm long past. Quick they sprang to see who'd been listenin', an' Cogoran leaned over an' dragged out a little bent man, blinkin' an' rubbin' his eyes in the glare o' the fire.

"'Twas hearkenin' he was," says Duach, fierce an' angry.

"Nay," whispered the little sthrange man. "'Tis from the ships o' Haco I come. A man o' these parts I am, taken prisoner in an old raid, an' this night I slipped off the ship when none saw me, an' here to cry to Cormac for freein'. Forbye bein' weary from toilin' at the oar, I fell to sleepin' in the leaves, and heard naught till this warrior gripped me."

"Were ye born free warrior?" asked Cogoran.

"Ay, that I was," says the crooked one.

"An' what man's man were ye?" asked Cormac.

"The man o' no man," says the other. An' then Cormac looked closer, an' knew

him to be one that had come to serve him in early days; the son of a poor kerne he was.

"Is not yer name Keir?" he asked.

"Ay," says the man.

"Then well I mind ye," says Cormac. "No free-born warrior are ye, but a servin' man, an' son o' Barach, that was bondman to King Aodh, me father. Here can ye not bide, for all save men o' free blood will bring ill fortune to the day comin'. Take food, what ye will, an' go yer way into the forest till the battlin' be over." An' Keir, hatin' him for his words, crept away without more speakin', an' quiet through the bushes, an' down the cliff-side to where the fightin' had been that day.

Now on the ship o' Haco was anger an' deep dhrinkin', an' great boastin' o' what would be done next day; but Haco stood on the deck forward, lookin' at the darkenin' cliffs, an' thinkin' o' bein' king in room o' Cormac, that had sthruck down more nor a score o' his men that day. An' as it grew

late, there was a small bent man crept up to him, comin' out o' the shadows.

"What will ye give if I show ye the road to beat down Cormac?" asked he.

"Yer freedom an' land o' yer own," says Haco, laughin' in his yellow beard at the wizened face o' him.

"Then is the payment mine," says Keir. Ah—h, but an evil snake o' the earth was that same, knowin' his own counthry-side as he did; for all the plannin' o' Cormac an' the counsel o' the Little Green King did he tell to Haco, offerin' to guide him unbeknownst to a road up the glens, an' bethrayin' those o' his own birthland into the clutches o' the Danes.

"An' 'tis meself that has not forgot the day when Cormac had me whipped for mis-threatin' a servin' lad!" says Keir. "Now 'tis me hour for payin' him."

"Ay," says Haco, "but first shall ye dress as a free warrior o' Cormac's men; fight or be afther seemin' to fight in his ranks, that ye bring him ill fortune; an' lead me men to the Glen o' Yew Trees."

An' Keir, tremblin' for what might come, dared say naught against it.

Then Haco fell to chucklin' in his beard. "'Tis plain what is the wise road for us," says he. An' straight he went to the men commandin' the other ships, an' together they laid plot to break holes in the boards o' the ships when the fightin' had begun; an' to dhrive the men o' Cormac toward the Glen o' Yew Trees, forcin' them to gain the ill-will o' the Little People (barrin' none save Keir knew where that glen lay).

'Twasn't half o' no time before all were on foot again; an' the Danes kept well together an' pushed for the top o' the cliffs. But sure, Cormac was ready there in the faint dawnin' light, waitin' to give them such welcome as they'd never tasted. An' while on the day before had been shoutin' an' wild calls, now was scarce a sound beyant the sword-sthrokes an' whirr o' flyin' arrows among the oaks.

Two times were the men o' Cormac pressed back by Haco, an' both times Cormac, speedin' one o' the darts o' Lèn, sthruck

down the fiercest o' those before him, whirlin' them apart like an eddy o' wind in a pile o' dhry leaves, an' the Danes fell away in turn. At last Haco, growin' impatient, gave signal to those at the ships ; an' in a flash o' time a great hole was stove in each bow, so that they'd float no more.

'Twas growin' toward night, an' when the Danes heard the crashin' o' the axes on the wood, an' knew what had passed, they thought it the work o' the men o' Cormac. Like wild boars at bay they turned an' flung themselves against the spears an' swords o' their foemen, without waitin' command from Haco ; an' so close were they all together, that there was no space for dhrawin' bow.

An' now Keir, that had been waitin' his time an' keepin' out o' danger behind the warriors o' Cormac, slipped by an' pointed out to Haco where was the Glen o' Yew Trees, fearin' goin' too nigh it himself. An' Haco, dhrawin' off a score o' his best warriors, drove the mass o' battlin' men little by little toward it, pressin' an' urgin' them

ever onward; while others, comin' fresh from the ships, reached the main body that was thyrin' to seize Cormac, an' gave them new strength.

All at once it flashed on the thought o' Cormac what was bein' done, an' he felt the last dart burn hot in his hand. Ay, though he'd been fightin' like a right hero as he was, he was nigh to bein' overpowered, while the feet o' his strugglin' men were already at the head o' the forbidden glen, without any seein' where they were goin'. Scarce a minute had he for choosin' between his honour's sake an' his own freedom, but his given word was sthrong in his heart, an' the dart flew whistlin' far from him, sthrikin' in the heart o' the battle, an' breakin' down great trees that choked up the mouth o' the glen so that none could reach it. An' under all was Keir, havin' received his freedom an' the land on which he lay, rewardin' him for bein' a thraitor. Sure, he never knew what had given him his death-blow.

Then as the Danes, seein' Cormac unarmed, rushed on him with a great cry o' triumphin', the sun sank out o' sight behind the mountains an' he was gone from their eyes. An' where they'd been sthrikin' at a sthrong warrior in a jerkin o' green, sure they found their darts an' axes buried deep in an old mossgrown log. An' all that night they searched in vain for him, far an' wide.

But Cormac, never knowin' how it came, opened his eyes as if wakin' from sleep, an' saw himself to be lyin' on the shore o' the Lough o' the Eagle, with the sunrise touchin' the hilltops around, the warm wind bringin' the song o' birds in place o' the battle-cries that had been ringin' in his ears, an' by him standin' the Little Green King.

"Where's me kingdom?" cried Cormac, gettin' on his feet, half mazed.

"Lost an' gone by the choice ye made," says the other. "Against yer given word ye set it, an' the word was sthronger, an' won. Cormac without a Kingdom are ye, but great

favour o' the Little People shall be to ye an' yer sons afther, to honour the word of a throe man."

"But me good fightin' men!" cried Cormac. "Naught was me kingdom to me in worth, beside the warriors who stood battlin' for me like throe brothers. Never would I have left them to be slain without me sharin' their fate."

"Aisy now," says the Little King, laughin' at his own thought. "Ne'er one is harmed or left to be slave to Haco. Many a day may the Northmen search, but naught will they find save the bones of a thraitor. An' though Haco hunt long an' weary days for the men o' Cormac, far off in counthries beyant pursuin' are they an' theirs—an' much renown shall they win. An' while Haco an' his men hold the ground on which they tread, yet a waste shall it grow, with neither harvestin' nor huntin' for their needs till the day when the last Dane leaves the Little People masthers o' the land.

"Not even meself could aid ye till sunset

o' the day o' the weakness o' me people ;
but rulers o' men shall yer sons be in the
end, an' strength an' swiftness beyant that
of other men shall be for ye an' for them
afther, while wearin' the green jerkin in
which ye fought for me—throwin' the last
dart o' Lèn without carin' for yer own
danger."

So King Cormac—that was Cormac with-
out a Kingdom, through keepin' faith with
the Little People that trusted him, an'
through holdin' fast to his word given—went
in to his own in the rough huntin' lodge, an'
lived there content to the end o' his life.
An' never was a greater hunter, nor one
swifter, nor a man sthronger. An' his
honour—held fair at a heavy price—was a
word for rememberin' many a year afther,
even in far lands.



XI

WIND AN' WAVE AN' WANDHERIN'
FLAME

XI

WIND AN' WAVE AN' WANDHERIN' FLAME

[“’Tis mindin’ somethin’ that happened far an’ back o’ the times o’ the Little People I am. Sure, ’tis meself had nigh on forgot it entirely, but when all’s quiet I’ll be afther tellin’ it.”]

THERE was always battlin’ somewhere, back in those days; an’ heroes that fought with sword an’ spear—forged far up an’ under the rainbow by LÊn the SMith, that was mighty in all sorts o’ wisdom.

Now one time he was beatin’ out a great shield o’ gold; an’ ’twas wrought so cunnin’ that who turned it over an’ laid it on the wather could step on it an’ sail where he would. An’ for a device on it he made roses o’ the fine gold, raised far out from it, as

they'd been growin' right there. Almost they seemed wavin' in the wind.

An' as he came to sthrikin' the last blows, his hand slipped, an' his great hammer went flyin' downward through the air; an' his cry o' command sent ringin' afther it was too late to hindher.

Now 'twas about toward sunset, an' the waves were beatin' high an' wild afther storm on the west coast, that Artân, son o' Duallach, that was a king's son, was huntin' along the coast. All day he'd been tryin' to keep from the company o' Myrdu, his half-brother, but only by now had he shaken him off; an' he was runnin' swiftly, for gladness o' bein' alone with the breeze an' the flyin' spray.

Just as the sinkin' sun touched the sea, he heard the great cryin'-out o' Lân, out o' the North, an' looked up into the deep sky. An' there he saw, whirlin' down toward him, somethin' first dark an' then bright. Not a fearin' thought was in him; an' as it came nigh he sprang with hand stretched out an'

caught it—just savin' it from bein' buried in the beach sand.

The force of its fallin' sent him to his knees, but in a breath he was on his feet again, lookin' at what he held. Sure, 'twas nothin' less than a great hammer, glowin' an' darkenin' by turns, as there had been livin' fire within it.

“What 'n ever are ye, then?” cried Artân, out o' the surprise, never thinkin' on gettin' an answer. Yet throe an' at once came a whisperin' like wind in pine forests far off—

“The hammer o' Lên.”

“An' how'll I get ye back to him, not knowin' where to find him?” asked Artân. “Sure, the winds must rise up an' blow me to the end o' the rainbow, where he sits, or I'll never get there at all.”

The words were scarce past his lips when down across the hills came a warm gust o' south wind—the last o' the storm—an' caught him up, still clingin' to the hammer, an' swept him upwards till he could see naught for mist an' hurryin' clouds. Then came a feelin' o'

sinkin', an' a sudden jar; an' there he was standin' on green turf, lookin' at white mountains, risin' higher nor aught he'd seen, an' between him an' them shimmered the rainbow itself, glowin' all colours in the light o' sunset.

"Ay, 'tis aisy seein' where I am," laughed Artân, startin' toward it bravely.

For a while he went on, an' at last he came nigh enough to see the mighty shape o' Lên, standin' waitin' at his forge. An' while night was fast comin' on, an' the stars showin' out in the sky over all, yet the sun-fire was still flamin' up in his smithy, workin' his will at a word.

If fear had had place in the heart of Artân, then was time for it, when he saw the deep eyes o' Lên, like dark sea-water in caves, lookin' far an' through him. But never had that come to him, an' without speakin' he raised the hammer toward the sthrong knotted hand that claimed it.

"Whist, then!" says Lên, graspin' it quick for fear the metal was coolin'. "Say naught

till I'm done!" With that he beat an' turned the shield, an' gave the endin' touches to it. Then, with another big shout, he hung it on the rainbow, flashin' an' shinin' till men on earth below saw it for Northern Lights in the night sky.

"How came ye here in me forge, Artân, son o' Duallach?" he cried.

"That I know not," spoke out Artân. "When I held yon hammer in hand, an' cried on the wind for blowin' me to him that owned it—for no other road there was for returnin' it—the warm blast came out o' the south an' caught me up here."

"Ay," laughed Lên, deep an' hearty. "The winds are at the will o' him that handles it; but too great a power is that to be given careless to mortal man. What reward will ye have, now? Whether gold, or power above other men, or the fairest o' maids for yer wife?"

Then the blood reddened the face of Artân.

"Naught care I for gold," says he. "An'

power over men should be for him that wins it fair."

"Then 'tis the fairest o' maids ye'll be afther wantin'?" asked Lèn. "Have ye seen such a one?"

"Nay," says Artân. "Dark are the faces in the house o' Duallach, an' little to me likin'."

"Then shall ye have one fair as day," says Lèn. He turned to where the shield was hangin', an' from the heart o' that same he plucked a rose o' the beaten gold, an' gave it to Artân.

"Cast it in the sea surf at sunrise," says he, "callin' 'Darthuil!'—then shall ye have yer reward. But one thing mind. Safely yer own is she not till first lost an' won back. When ye know not where to seek aid in searchin', cry on me name at the sea-coast, an' aid will there be for ye if ye come not too late—wind, wave, an' wandherin' flame. Never does Lèn forget. Hold fast yer rose."

As he spoke, again came a gale, chill from

the north this time, an' whirled Artân past cloud an' above surgin' seas, an' left him on the hilltop above the beach at the last hour before the dawnin'.

Quick Artân hastened down the cliff, still graspin' the golden rose, an' stood where the little small waves curled over the stones, waitin' for the first gleam o' the sun to touch the sea. Hours it seemed to him, but minutes it was in truth, before he caught a long breath, raised the rose high in air, an' tossed it swift an' sure into the snowy crest of a green incomin' wave.

“Darthuil!” he cried, an' the cliff echo made a song of it.

As the drops flew upward in the red dawn an' the breaker swept in, there by his side stood a maid with the gold o' the rose in her hair, an' the white o' sea-foam in her fair skin, an' the colour o' the sunrise in lips an' cheek. Blither nor spring, he caught her hand an' led her over the hills to the house o' Duallach, they two singin' for joy o' livin' as they went.

Now not long had the two been wed (an' welcome were they under the roof of Duallach), when Myrdu, that was half-brother to Artân, but older nor him, came back from far huntin', ill-pleased at missin' Artân for his companion, an' for helpin' him carry the red deer he'd shot.

"'Tis an ill youth," says he, "an' will get no good from lyin' on the cliff edge an' lettin' the hunt go by."

"Nay," says Duallach, slow to anger. "Fair fortune has he won, an' the favour o' the gods; an' has brought home a bride, fair as the sun at noon."

Then was Myrdu half ragin' from bein' jealous; but not wishin' to show that same, he called for meat an' dhrink to be brought him in the great hall. An' Artân, wishin' to be friendly like, cried out for Darthuil to serve his brother. Sure, when Myrdu saw her comin' toward him—shinin' among the dark lasses o' Duallach's household like a star in the night sky—fury was in his heart for thinkin' that Artân, bein' younger nor

him, had won what he had not, an' soon he laid plans for stealin' her from his brother.

'Twas not many days before word o' this came to the ear o' Duallach; an' he, hatin' strife, bade Artân an' Darthuיל take horse an' ride swiftly southward to the Lough o' the Lone Valley, to dwell on the little island in it till evil wishes had passed from the heart o' Myrdu. So Artân, mindin' what Lân had foretold, yet thinkin' it wiser not to be afther losin' Darthuיל at all, rode away with her on his left hand when Myrdu was sleepin' an' not knowin' what was bein' done.

When he roused an' found them gone, an' that none o' the house would say whither, he was in a fine passion; but he made as if he was afther goin' huntin', an' took his two fierce hounds an' went off to trace the road they'd taken. An' sure enough, 'twas not many hours before he was on their path.

Now safer would it have been had Artân told Darthuיל the full raison why he was takin' her far into the shelter o' forest an'

lough o' the wildherness; but she, trustin' him, asked naught, thinkin' no evil o' livin' man. So scarce had Artân left her in the low cabin on the island an' gone off to hunt, than Myrdu pushed through the bushes, leavin' the hounds on the shore behind, an' floated himself out to the island on a couple o' logs lashed with a thong o' deer-skin. Ay, but Darthuïl was startled, not dhreamin' why he'd come.

“'Tis Artân is hurt, an' afther sendin' me for ye,” says Myrdu, lookin' down unaisy like, from not wishin' to meet the rare clear eyes o' her. “Come, an' I'll take ye where he lies.”

Not waitin' a moment was Darthuïl, then, but hurried doin' as she was bid, never thinkin' what evil might be in store.

Afther a few hours Artân came back through the trees, an' game a plenty he'd found. He pulled out his boat o' skins, an' quick paddled back to the island. But there he found no Darthuïl; no, nor any sign o' her save the little print o' her sandal by the wather's edge.

Then came to his mind the promise o' Lèn. Never darin' to waste an hour searchin' by himself, he ferried his horse across to the mainland, mounted, an' pushed for the sea. Never once did he stop for restin' till he was standin' where the waves beat over him, where he had cried on Darthuill, an' she had come to him.

"Lèn!" he called. "Yer aidin', Lèn! Darthuill is stolen from me."

There came a rumblin' o' thunder, an' on the shore stood a great figure, like a pillar o' cloud reachin' half to the sky.

"Never safe yer own till lost an' found, I said," came the deep voice. "Now I give ye wild servants, a wind an' a wave an' a wandherin' flame for helpin' ye to bring her safe again. Mind well that each will obey ye but once, so call on them only when yer sharpest need comes. When ye've again set the feet o' Darthuill safe in the hall o' Duallach, none can take her from ye more. Now follow yer love. 'Tis to the Northland has Myrdu carried her. Let him not pass

the White Rocks, or wind an' wave an' flame will lose power to aid ye. Use yer wit, now, an' use it well."

Artân would have spoken to thank him, but with the last word Lân was no more there; so he mounted again an' turned to the north; an' behind him came the wind, whisperin' over the grass; an' the wave, runnin' up the sthream near at hand; an' the flame, creepin' among dhry leaves, but settin' fire to naught else, its time not bein' come.

Together they all thravelled the better part of a long day, an' late on Artân saw dust risin' ahead. 'Twas a cloud that Myrdu had raised to hide the way he was goin', an' beyond it he was ridin', carryin' Darthuill before him on his saddle o' skins, with the two hounds lopin' along beside to fright her from tryin' to escape, an' to give warnin' of any followin'; while not many miles ahead were the White Rocks, that he was pushin' to reach.

On hurried Artân, but his horse was

wearied, an' little head could he make. Moreover, the cloud o' dust left him uncertain o' what was hid. So he thought well, an' chose wind to serve him first.

"Go on, an' blow the dust far away, whisperin' courage to Darthuil the while," says he. An' at once the wind sped far ahead, obeyin' his command. When the two dogs felt it touch them, they cowered low; but Darthuil took heart, knowin' that help was at hand. An' the dust was no more hidin' her from Artân, so she waved her hand an' called aloud to him to ride in haste.

Then Myrdu, fearin' that he might yet lose her, threw a handful o' twigs behind him in the road; an' fallin' they turned into dead trees, stoppin' the way on all sides. But Artân well knew the way to clear his path.

"Go forward!" he cried to the wandherin' flame, "an' leave not a trace o' them!" As he spoke, the flame swept up high in air, roarin' an' smokin'; an' in half an instant naught remained o' the logs but a pile o'

smouldherin' ashes. But still was Myrdu fast nearin' his goal, an' had one thing more for helpin'.

He dropped a little sharp knife in the roadway; an' as it fell, it cut into the dust, an' there opened a wide, terrible chasm, not to be crossed by horse nor man. Then Artân grew clear desperate.

"Wave!" he shouted, "bring Darthuil to me!"

Up then it rose, rollin' forward like flood-tide in spring; an' it filled the gulf, an' swept away dogs an' horse an' Myrdu himself, that none were heard of from that on; but Darthuil it floated gentle like, as she had been a tuft o' thistle-down, back to Artân, waitin' for her.

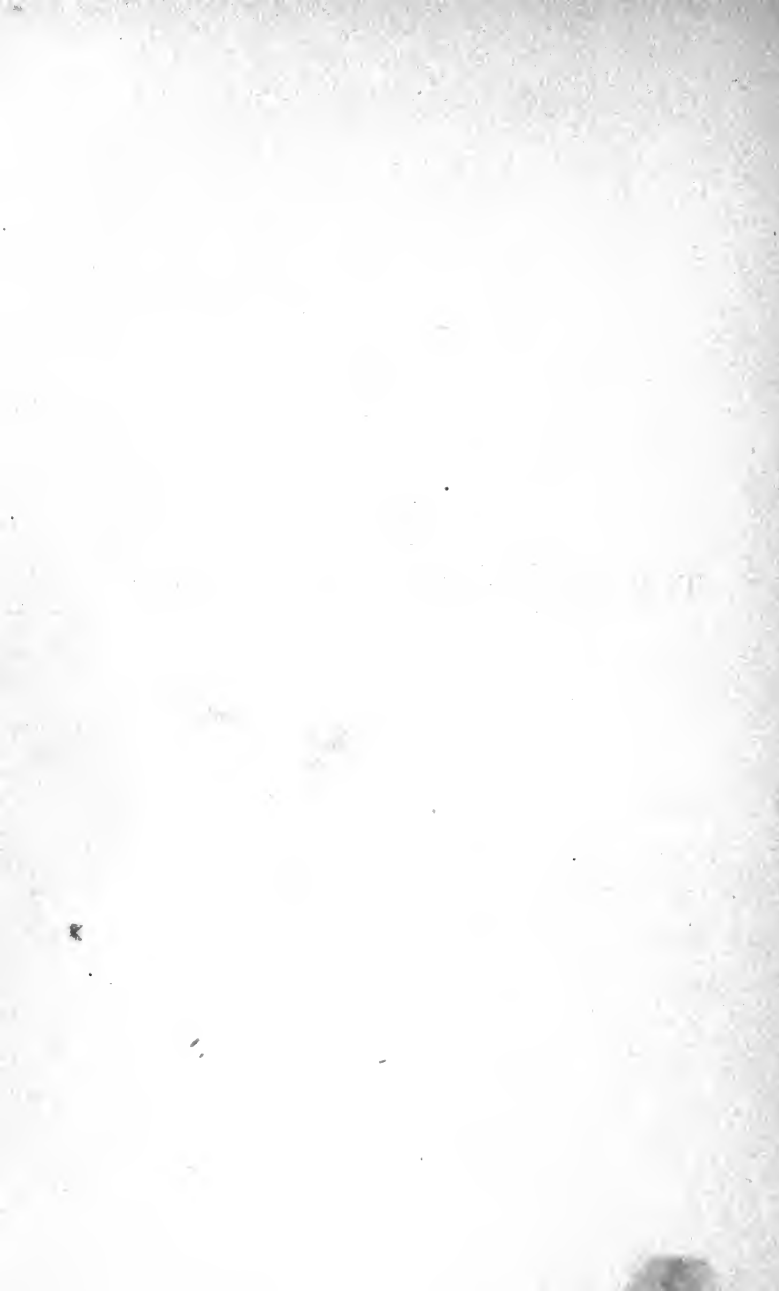
He caught her an' clasped her close, an' turned his horse, an' never halted till he led her safe into the hall o' Duallach, where none might steal her from him again. An' there they lived happy all their lives.

But as for the wind an' the wave an' the wandherin' flame, so sweet an' fair was

Darthuil that ne'er would they go from her to return to Lên. To the last o' her life the wind blew soft for her when 'twas overly hot elsewhere, an' clear cool wather flowed up from the ground to save her dhrawin' any from the river, an' fire burned bright on her hearth without need o' plenishin'; an' all that for the love o' Dartuil, that was made by Lên out o' the foam tossed by the wind from the sea-wave, an' the wandherin' flame o' the sunrise.

XII

THE KING O' THE THREE WINDS



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THE KING O' THE THREE WINDS

[“ So yees liked hearin’ o’ Lèn? Sure ’twas a mighty smith he was, up under the rainbow, an’ mather o’ craft beyant all mortal men; an’ not mindin’ a bit o’ jestin’, either, when time served. I mind hearin’ once—whist, now, an’ I’ll tell yees that one tale more, about him, an’ that’ll be the last.”]

THERE was one day when mighty battlin’ was goin’ on, far to the west. An’ Lèn, wearyin’ o’ the sun-forgè an’ the bright curvin’ o’ the rainbow, leaned on the north wind to look down at the heroes strivin’ for mather on the sea-coast, with the waves beatin’ in high on the rocks. An’ more nor one carried spear or shield o’ Lèn’s forgin’, an’ the sun shinin’ on the swing o’ swords

was like sparks flyin' from his furnace. An what had come to pass aforetime happened again, for sure, a second time his hammer slipped from his graspin' an' fell through the clouds.

But 'tis truth I'm tellin' yees that 'twas many an hour before he knew that same. Little meanin' had time an' the passin' o' time to Lân. The wild fight was still ragin' on, an' naught cared he for work other than seein' it. So not till truce was cried was he afther lookin' round for his own; an' then no matter where he looked he could see no trace o' that same far off nor close by him. An' dark an' cloud had blown across the sea, coverin' day with night. So back went Lân to his forge, an' sat down for thinkin'—seein' as how he couldn't be workin'—an' the north wind rumbled in his chimney.

Many a day passed in that thinkin', an' all that time the north wind blew cowld across the land from the ould Sea, so that men were feared o' winter comin' before harvestin'.

At last Lén roused to be doin', an' with a mighty laugh that shook the tops o' the cloud mountains, he strode off down the bridge o' fog shadows to seek for his hammer; with the north wind at his heel, quiet, an' scarce darin' to scather the wet mists out o' the path.

Now 'twas comin' to be the end o' harvestin' on the lands o' Mahon, chieftain o' the men o' Rosnaree. An' in the hall o' the wide earthen dùn sat Mahon an' the older men, tellin' tales o' heroes, with tall flagons o' foamin' mead before them; but on the grass by the little river the young men an' boys were playin' at ball, an' castin' spears at a mark; an' headin' them all was Rodan, sister's son to Mahon, dressed fine in rich cloth o' green laced with gold. An' never a one o' them could match him at the games.

Now while they were runnin' back an' along the river bank, one lad that happened to be afther lookin' over his shouldher began laughin' an' laughin'. An' says Rodan, laughin' too—

"What for are ye makin' me spoil me aim?"

"'Tis for the ould beggar man," says the lad. "See him comin', now, an' draggin' an empty chain as if 'twas his dog he was leadin'. An' sure, 'tis speakin' to it he is, tellin' it to be quiet."

With that, all save Rodan started laughin' at the ould, crooked beggar man that was comin' down by the wather side, all in a ragged cloak, carryin' a bit of a rusty chain, an' in his belt more pieces o' that same.

As he came nigher, a cowld north wind flutherin' the tattered cloak he wore, an' flingin' it back that any might see the bare knotted arms an' sthrong hands of him, he turned aside an' threw the chain round a bit of a saplin' that grew near, an' at once the wind fell. Then he looked round at the lads.

"Is it for sake o' me rags that ye're jeerin' at an ould man?" says he.

"Nay," says Rodan, lookin' wrath at his fellows. "'Tis at yer empty chain they

were laughin', as boys will. None o' the house o' Mahon will ye find showin' scorn to age or to one in need. An' a night's lodgin' an' a piece o' silver Mahon gives to any that come, an' none may question whither he goes afther."

"A rare jewel have I lost," says the ould bent beggar, lookin' sharp at Rodan under his shaggy brows, "an' near an' far have I been seekin' it."

"Then come with me to Mahon an' the wiser men, an' it may be they'll have heard somewhat of it, an' be afther guidin' ye to find that same," says Rodan, gentle like; an' takin' the arm o' the sthranger, to be helpin' him a bit, he led him in at the door.

Now Mahon, lookin' up, saw the two comin'; an' risin' to meet one older an' seemin' feebler nor himself, he caught a glint o' the deep eyes under the heavy brows, an' knew well from years past who was in his hall as guest. But never a word he spoke showin' it, for better he thought

it to wait on the will o' one mightier nor him.

"'Tis kindly welcome ye are," says he, dhrawin' forward the bench for him to be seated. An' Rodan brought food an' spread it on the board before the wayfarin' man, an' his own golden cup filled brimmin' with wine.

"'Tis a sthranger, weary with farin' far to seek a lost jewel," spoke Rodan, "an' needin' rest an' aidin'."

"An' what for a threasure was that same?" asked one o' Mahon's men, that sat nigh. "Maybe one among us may have heard talk of it, an' can give ye word where to find it."

For a time the ould man made no answer; but afther eatin' a while (an' 'twas the amazin' hunger he seemed to be havin'), he leaned his arm on the rough oaken table an' looked at Mahon, that had been silent, thinkin' o' many wonderful things.

"What for a wind had ye yestermorn?" says he.

Then Mahon, showin' respect as to a famed warrior, answered—

“For three hours afther sunrise it blew from the east. Then for three more from the west. Then came a sthrong gale from the south. An' like that same has it been for ten days an' ten more.”

“An' has no wind come from the north?” asked the ould man.

“Not in all that time,” says Mahon. “Before those days was naught but stormin' from the north for long weeks.”

Then Rodan spoke eagerly. “Ay, but in this very hour came wind from the north, blowin' our spears past their mark.” An' as the words came from him, a deep growlin' was heard without the dûn, an' a sweep o' wind that stirred the thatch above their heads. Rodan looked up wondherin', but the ould man chuckled.

“'Tis me dog, restless from bein' tied in one place,” says he; an' then low, that none but Mahon heard: “me dog, the north wind. 'Tis for his fellows I seek, servants

o' the hammer that slipped from me grasp while I leaned watchin' the war o' the western heroes. An' he would have gone too had I not been houldin' him."

"Ay?" says Mahon. "Then hear what word o' them I have for ye, good mather o' wisdom an' lord o' power, rememberin' well yer aid given free in me hour o' need in a year long past. Yester morn rode up the river bank a man in rich armour, an' afther him many a sthrong fightin' man. An' last o' them, on a lame pony, a sour-faced dwarf. An' when Rodan here questioned o' them who they were, none would give civil word save the dwarf, that cried out: "'Tis me lord the King o' the Three Winds, returnin' from victory. An' 'tis an ill fate comes to any that hindher him.' An' no more word would he speak, but rode away past on his limpin' nag. Sure, never was such a king known of any in these parts."

The ould beggar nodded, as bein' well pleased, an' rose. An' so tall was he that

he'd need to be stoopin' to pass the lintel o' the door.

"What lad is this same that led me to ye, Mahon o' Rosnaree?" says he, his voice as deep as a wave in the heart o' the Ould Sea.

"Rodan, sister's son to me," says Mahon, "an' the very core o' me heart, seein' that no sons o' me own house have I, to give aidin' in battle when me right arm fails me with age."

"An' has he won honour to his name?" says the ould man.

"Not yet," answered Mahon, lookin' lovin' at the lad, an' seein' the hot blood risin' in his cheeks from hearin' the two discussin' him. "Time an' plenty for that," says Mahon.

"Then give him leave to go with me on me questin'," says the ould man. "Rare fame shall he win, an' a warrior shall he be, fit to match with heroes."

An' while Rodan sprang first to his feet in wrath at any thinkin' him one to go trudgin' in the dust by a ragged beggar man, yet he'd

no more nor met the eyes o' the stranger than all anger left him, an' 'twas to the end o' the world he'd have gone willin' with that same.

"Ay," says Mahon. "'Tis meself is well content to have him serve ye. This many a day has he been wearyin' to go out seekin' fortune."

With never another word the stranger bent an' passed the door, an' Rodan afther him, never heedin' the wonder o' the lads round about. An' mazed were all when they saw the ould man givin' him the chains from his belt to carry, himself unwindin' the one from the saplin'.

"Which road went the King o' the Three Winds?" says the beggar.

"Toward the Ford of Echoes, I heard one cry out," says Rodan.

So on by day an' night, never restin' for aught but the askin' some passer-by as to the man they were huntin', they went through the wood an' over hill an' rock, till they reached the Ford of Echoes. An' there, on

the hillside before them, rose a great high castle, with grey towers an' wide walls. An' waverin' it seemed, once an' again, like a thing in a dhream. Sure, the ould man sat down laughin'.

"'Tis his gran' dwellin' we've been afther discoverin', Rodan," says he. "Will ye batther it down with yer hands, or shall I set me dog to the work?"

"An' afther 'tis done will yer threasure lie open to ye?" says the lad.

"That's for thinkin' about," says the other, well pleased. "'Tis a wise word ye spoke, not knowin'. Scant use to break down his walls before findin' where he's me jewel hid. Whist, now, for one's comin' down the hillside."

While they stood watchin', a dead branch cracked, an' to the ford, to dhraw wather, came a straight, slender girleen, an' on her shouldher was an earthen jar. When she saw the two beyant the runnin' sthream she shook her head.

"'Tis an ill land this for any poor men

farin' alone. Betther that ye hasten on, stayin' for naught, till ye pass the power o' Curigh Mor."

"An' who may be Curigh Mor, that men journeyin' in peace should fear him?" asked Rodan, seein' how fair was the curlin' black hair o' the maid, an' the little white feet in the grass.

"King o' the Three Winds is he, an' has been for a score o' days an' more," says she. "A poor kerne was he born, an' thrall in me father's house. One day 'twas himself came in with somethin' shinin' under his cloak; an' when me father asked what was that same, he spoke scorn o' his masthery, an' sthruck him down. An' from that hour power over three winds has he gained—east an' west an' south, to work his will. An' for that I would say naught to him, the walls o' me father's dwellin' lie scattered an' blown far down the mountain side; an' meself must dhraw the wather an' be servin' maid to them that serve him; an' all for scornin' him. Three times have I fled far

down the river bank, an' each time has one o' the winds caught me an' blown me back to his castle gate. An' 'tis small hope o' help from any livin' man I have, for none can withstand the winds out o' the sky."

"An' whose child may ye be, that has been so mistreated?" says the ould man. "Maybe we'll be afther findin' some way to aid ye."

"Eimer is me name, daughter o' him that was Duach o' the Ford," says she, bendin' to fill her jar with clear wather. "An' a good warrior was that same, that sthruck no man from behind, even when it was his own slave rebellin'."

"Then shall yer wrong be righted," says the ould man. "Choose for yerself whether by me dog or me man, here."

Eimer looked at him, doubtin', an' her eyes grew dark with anger. "'Tis mockin' me ye are," says she. "I see no dog followin' ye; an' what can a lad like yon do against the King o' the Three Winds. If he have the power in his arm to slay

even the meanest kerne that slinks by the gates o' Curigh Mor, 'tis debtor to him I'll be; but sthrong men are they that ride in his train."

"What shall be done shall ye see," says the ould man, flashin' fire like the sun on steel from the deep eyes o' him. "Now lead us to Curigh Mor, an' leave yer fearin' for us."

Wide were the eyes of Eimer to see the wather o' the ford dhraw back to let the two pass dhry shod. Thremblin' came on her, an' silent she led the two up the path to the castle. Yet at the gate she waited a bit, lookin' from the bent ould beggar man, worn and slow steppin', to the bright youth, richly clad, that followed him as a man his masher.

"Betther that ye come no farther, riskin' yer lives for a servin' maid," says she. "A rough man is Curigh Mor."

"Then rougher shall he find us," says the ould man. "Go you an' tell him that two sthrangers crave shelter for the night."

'Twas before the main gateway they were now, an' as Eimer slipped in away from them, it seemed to Rodan as a swirl o' mist had wrapped her from sight.

"An' what for an' whatever a castle may this be?" he asked, wondherin' not a little at the quare silence all round, for never a bird sang in any tree, nor child played on the meadow beyant, nor chatter o' maids an' men came from the courtyards or archways. Only a dull rushin' sound o' storm far underground was round them.

"The place o' one not to be trusted with power above that o' men that were his masthers afore," says the ould man, gruff an' short.

"An' have we strength to cast him from it?" cried Rodan, his face flushin' with eagerness, an' his heart hot with rage at Curigh Mor for layin' heavy hand on a tender lass with none to guard her.

"Ay, that may ye do alone. Hearken to me, Rodan. A lad are ye yet, but power shall be given ye if yer heart fail ye not.

That which I lost has Curigh Mor found an' turned to evil uses. One chance will I give him to mend his ways, an' if he refuse me that which is me own, then do ye stand forth me champion an' offer battle to all who come, beginnin' with a man o' yer own years. An' the power of each man ye overcome shall be added to yer own, an' a mighty champion shall ye be held afther. But mind this through the battlin'. All in all is it to ye that ye let no fear come nigh yer heart, even though a giant were challengin'."

An' Rodan nodded, gay an' blithe at the words o' the beggar man. Afther a minute more, the gate opened, an' a great slouchin' fellow put out his head.

"What seek ye, beggars, at the door o' Curigh Mor, the mighty King o' Three Winds that work his will night an' day?" says he.

"'Tis a smith I am," says the ould man, "an' by ill fortune I was afther losin' me hammer. 'Tis seekin' it through all lands

I am, for its mate has never been seen far nor wide. 'Tis askin' I'd be whether Curigh Mor has found it."

"Come in," says the gatekeeper. So in they went, an' before them was the wide courtyard. At the farther side stood a knot o' men, an' to them the gatekeeper pointed.

"Go to them," says he. "There stands Curigh Mor, with the sthrongest champions o' his court. But 'tis riskin' yer ould skin an' bones ye are. Betther for ye to go sound an' safe, if wantin' yer hammer, than to cross the King o' the Three Winds."

But the ould smith shook off the hand o' the one that would have warned him back, an' beckoned Rodan, an' together they passed across the open space.

Those standin' nigh to Curigh Mor laughed at seeing the ould bent gaffer hobblin' along, an' a bright young lad, that was yet scarce come to man's years, comin' afther with his arm filled with rusty chains. But a chill went over the heart

o' Curigh Mor, an' he drew his rich cloak closer round him.

"What seek ye, beardin' the King o' the Three Winds?" says he.

"The help o' Curigh Mor to give me back that which is me own," says the ould smith.

"An' what may that be?" asked Curigh Mor, scowlin' fierce an' angered like.

"Me hammer," says the ould beggar. "'Twas restin' a bit from me forgin' on a suit of armour I was, an' let it slip from me hand; an' when I would have gone back to me work, 'twas gone; an' ever since have I been searchin' vainly for it. A gift from a mighty hand it was, with powers like none other; for glowin' with fire is it, an' needs no guidin' for doin' its work. Golden is its handle, an' wrought with sthrange runes an' spells."

He looked waitin' at Curigh Mor, that shouted rough like—

"Nay, be off with yees! I know naught o' yer hammer!"

“A fine thing, that, for any to be afther givin’ to a beggar man,” chuckled a quare bit of a dwarf that was sittin’ cross-legged nigh them. “Maybe ye’ve stolen his cloak o’ silver cloth, forbye his hammer, Curigh Mor; to speak naught o’ his fine suit o’ bronze armour an’ the torc o’ wrought gold from his neck.”

An’ while all round were shakin’ an’ laughin’ at the angered face o’ the ould smith, Rodan was keepin’ eye on Curigh Mor. A tall, dark, heavy man was he, an’ with lowerin’ brows an’ great black beard like many o’ those nigh. An’ bein’ as it was warm in the sun, Rodan was wondherin’ how it was that he kept his cloak so tight held to him. An’ as he was lookin’, the ould smith raised his hand with the fourth chain, an’ the corner o’ Curigh Mor’s mantle blew aside. An’ beneath Rodan saw, hangin’ from his belt, a hammer, with handle o’ wrought gold; an’ the head o’ that same was glowin’ like a coal o’ fire in the wind.

Never waitin’ to think what might come,

Rodan sprang forward an' struck Curigh Mor on the breast.

"'Tis a false thafe ye are!" says he, fearless. "Give back the hammer, lest evil come on ye an' all in yer ill-gotten castle. The son of a warrior am I, an' sister's son to Mahon o' Rosnaree, an' no man's man but his, that was once aided in need by this man ye're afther showin' scorn to. An' every man in yer court do I challenge to fight for it, takin' one o' me own years first, an' then one sthronger—till I come to yerself, Curigh Mor, that was born no king, but thrall of a betther man nor stands jeerin' by ye. An' the hammer shall ye return to him that owns it by right; an' Eimer, daughter o' Duach o' the Ford, shall ye free, an' give gold in king's measure for forcin' her to serve the cowards that serve ye, thrall an' traitor an' thafe!"

Then was Curigh Mor ragin' past words. He beckoned to a young fightin' man that stood by, an' pointed to Rodan. An' 'twas few words were needed there. Swords were out, an' silent were all as the wind o' yester

morn—while clash! went steel on steel. An' before Curigh Mor had fair taken breath to watch the outcomin', sure, Rodan had sthruck down young Seumas, an' had him lyin' at his mercy on the rough stones. Dark wrath was in the face o' the King o' the Three Winds in that hour.

The ould smith signed quick to Rodan to hearken.

“Hang the chains loose on yer arm,” says he, whisperin' low, “an' if a wind sweeps over ye, cast a chain at it an' take no more heed, for all will go well.”

Rodan nodded, light-hearted an' full o' courage, an' stepped out to meet the next man that offered. An' 'twas one broad-shouldhered an' scarred with much battlin' that met him—for many o' the weaker o' Curigh Mor's men began slippin' off quiet like, fearin' to be called on to fight in an ill quarrel.

Now the strength o' two was in Rodan's arm, yet was he pressed hard. An' as the smith watched, sure, one pulled at his arm

from behind, an' 'twas Eimer, her face white with dreadin' what might come to the lad.

"Look to Curigh Mor," says she. "'Tis turnin' to the south he is. The wind 'll be afther workin' his wicked will."

"Wait an' see," counselled the smith. "Be ready, too, an' when ye see a chain fall from the hand o' the lad that fights yer battle an' mine, run ye quick an' bring it to me, fearin' naught."

Then Curigh Mor pulled the hammer from his girdle, thinkin' none saw—an' called on the south wind to dhrive off the beggars. But as it swept up the courtyard, Rodan, never ceasin' his sword playin', threw the first o' the chains from him—an' sudden all was still, the chain lyin' in the dust an' the scarred warrior by it. Eimer hastened quick an' brought it to its right owner, that grasped it an' held it with firm grip, sayin' words that none could make out.

When Curigh Mor saw that the power o' the south wind hindhered Rodan never a bit, he swift loosed the east wind and the west

wind, an' like a whirlwind they howled as they met. Scarce knew Rodan where to turn, but out he flung the chains, an' the winds sank, mastered. An' Curigh Mor saw his warriors an' his sthrong fightin' men slinkin' out o' the gate, not wishin' to risk battlin' with that lad. Losin' all wisdom, he dhrew out the hammer that he'd so far hidden close, an' whirled it above his head, meanin' to beat down the young hero that had named him for what he was. But as the great hammer, glowin' an' sparklin', left his hand, flyin' through the air, the ould beggar whistled sharp an' shrill, an' like a bird swervin' in flight the hammer went straight into the knotted hand o' Lèn the Smith, that had sought it over many lands.

Sure, a hush o' death was there in the courtyard, an' Curigh Mor covered his false head with his arm, while Rodan stood wonderin' that none came against him.

High in air flashed the hammer, held in the sthrong grasp that knew it well. An' in place o' the rags that had covered the ould

beggar, armour o' wrought bronze an' a cloak o' silver cloth, an' a torc o' fine gold wrought by no mortal smith glittered in the noon sun. Once he swung his arm, shakin' wide the chains, an' the four winds swept out from him on every side, an' the walls o' Curigh Mor's castle were scattered an' flyin' down the valley side.

Again he whirled the hammer, an' Curigh Mor an' his dwarf, that were all left o' the proud company, shrunk down to no bigger nor yer finger, an' scutthered away an' hid in the leaves.

"'Tis not for little men to be afther showin' discourtesy to sthrangers," says Lân, laughin'.

Then, towerin' high above the forest trees, where the birds were singin' wild an' free, he bent an' caught up Rodan an' Eimer, an' back he strode across the land, like the comin' of a thunder-cloud, never settin' them down till he saw, far below, the great dûn o Mahon, chieftain in Rosnaree.

Sure, those within heard the growlin' o' storm, but naught they saw save a dark





“Rodan cheerin’ Eimer with brave words.”

mist risin' from where stood Rodan, cheerin' Eimer with brave words.

In the flashin' o' lightnin' from above came a long line o' little men in green, carryin' gold an' rich gifts for the daughter o' Duach, to the hall where sat Mahon—but never more did Lèn the Smith come wandherin' to Rosnaree, seekin' aught lost by lookin' too long at heroes.

[“ An' now be off with yees for the last time, for I've never a tale, nor a thought of a tale, left in me poor ould brain. 'Tis meself ye've blandandhered out of all I ever knew, an' me mother before me—so out an' pack an' seek fortune for yerselves by an' beyant the fine school ye're off to the morn's mornin'.”]



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