# The Golden Spears

Once upon a time there lived in a little house under a hill a little old woman and her two children, whose names were Connla and Nora. Right in front of the door of the little house lay a pleasant meadow, and beyond the meadow rose up to the skies a mountain whose top was sharp-pointed like a spear. For more than half-way up it was clad with heather, and when the heather was in bloom it looked like a purple robe falling from the shoulders of the mountain down to its feet. Above the heather it was bare and grey, but when the sun was sinking in the sea, its last rays rested on the bare mountain top and made it gleam like a spear of gold, and so the children always called it the “Golden Spear.”In summer days they gambolled in the meadow, plucking the sweet wild grasses––and often and often they clambered up the mountain side, knee deep in the heather, searching for frechans and wild honey, and sometimes they found a bird’s nest––but they only peeped into it, they never touched the eggs or allowed their breath to fall upon them, for next to their little mother they loved the mountain, and next to the mountain they loved the wild birds who made the spring and summer weather musical with their songs.Sometimes the soft white mist would steal through the glen, and creeping up the mountain would cover it with a veil so dense that the children could not see it, and then they would say to each other: “Our mountain is gone away from us.” But when the mist would lift and float off into the skies, the children would clap their hands, and say: “Oh, there’s our mountain back again.”In the long nights of winter they babbled of the spring and summertime to come, when the birds would once more sing for them, and never a day passed that they didn’t fling crumbs outside their door, and on the borders of the wood that stretched away towards the glen.When the spring days came they awoke with the first light of the morning, and they knew the very minute when the lark would begin to sing, and when the thrush and the blackbird would pour out their liquid notes, and when the robin would make the soft, green, tender leaves tremulous at his song.It chanced one day that when they were resting in the noontide heat, under the perfumed shade of a hawthorn in bloom, they saw on the edge of the meadow, spread out before them, a speckled thrush cowering in the grass.“Oh, Connla! Connla! Look at the thrush––and, look, look up in the sky, there is a hawk!” cried Nora.Connla looked up, and he saw the hawk with quivering wings, and he knew that in a second it would pounce down on the frightened thrush. He jumped to his feet, fixed a stone in his sling, and before the whirr of the stone shooting through the air was silent, the stricken hawk tumbled headlong in the grass.The thrush, shaking its wings, rose joyously in the air, and perching upon an elm-tree in sight of the children, he sang a song so sweet that they left the hawthorn shade and walked along together until they stood under the branches of the elm; and they listened and listened to the thrush’s song, and at last Nora said:“Oh, Connla! did you ever hear a song so sweet as this?”“No,” said Connla, “and I do believe sweeter music was never heard before.”“Ah,” said the thrush, “that’s because you never heard the nine little pipers playing. And now, Connla and Nora, you saved my life to-day.”“It was Nora saved it,” said Connla, “for she pointed you out to me, and also pointed out the hawk which was about to pounce on you.”“It was Connla saved you,” said Nora, “for he slew the hawk with his sling.”“I owe my life to both of you,” said the thrush. “You like my song, and you say you have never heard anything so sweet; but wait till you hear the nine little pipers playing.”“And when shall we hear them?” said the children.“Well,” said the thrush, “sit outside your door to-morrow evening, and wait and watch until the shadows have crept up the heather, and then, when the mountain top is gleaming like a golden spear, look at the line where the shadow on the heather meets the sunshine, and you shall see what you shall see.”And having said this, the thrush sang another song sweeter than the first, and then saying “good-bye,” he flew away into the woods.The children went home, and all night long they were dreaming of the thrush and the nine little pipers; and when the birds sang in the morning, they got up and went out into the meadow to watch the mountain.The sun was shining in a cloudless sky, and no shadows lay on the mountain, and all day long they watched and waited, and at last, when the birds were singing their farewell song to the evening star, the children saw the shadows marching from the glen, trooping up the mountain side and dimming the purple of the heather.And when the mountain top gleamed like a golden spear, they fixed their eyes on the line between the shadow and the sunshine.“Now,” said Connla, “the time has come.”“Oh, look! look!” said Nora, and as she spoke, just above the line of shadow a door opened out, and through its portals came a little piper dressed in green and gold. He stepped down, followed by another and another, until they were nine in all, and then the door slung back again. Down through the heather marched the pipers in single file, and all the time they played a music so sweet that the birds, who had gone to sleep in their nests, came out upon the branches to listen to them and then they crossed the meadow, and they went on and on until they disappeared in the leafy woods.While they were passing the children were spell-bound, and couldn’t speak, but when the music had died away in the woods, they said:“The thrush is right, that is the sweetest music that was ever heard in all the world.”And when the children went to bed that night the fairy music came to them in their dreams. But when the morning broke, and they looked out upon their mountain and could see no trace of the door above the heather, they asked each other whether they had really seen the little pipers, or only dreamt of them.That day they went out into the woods, and they sat beside a stream that pattered along beneath the trees, and through the leaves tossing in the breeze the sun flashed down upon the streamlet, and shadow and sunshine danced upon it. As the children watched the water sparkling where the sunlight fell, Nora said:“Oh, Connla, did you ever see anything so bright and clear and glancing as that?”“No,” said Connla, “I never did.”“That’s because you never saw the crystal hall of the fairy of the mountains,” said a voice above the heads of the children.And when they looked up, who should they see perched on a branch but the thrush.“And where is the crystal hall of the fairy?” said Connla.“Oh, it is where it always was, and where it always will be,” said the thrush. “And you can see it if you like.”“We would like to see it,” said the children.“Well, then,” said the thrush, “if you would, all you have to do is to follow the nine little pipers when they come down through the heather, and cross the meadow to-morrow evening.”And the thrush having said this, flew away.Connla and Nora went home, and that night they fell asleep talking of the thrush and the fairy and the crystal hall.All the next day they counted the minutes, until they saw the shadows thronging from the glen and scaling the mountain side. And, at last, they saw the door springing open, and the nine little pipers marching down.They waited until the pipers had crossed the meadow and were about to enter the wood. And then they followed them, the pipers marching on before them and playing all the time. It was not long until they had passed through the wood, and then, what should the children see rising up before them but another mountain, smaller than their own, but, like their own, clad more than half-way up with purple heather, and whose top was bare and sharp-pointed, and gleaming like a golden spear.Up through the heather climbed the pipers, up through the heather the children clambered after them, and the moment the pipers passed the heather a door opened and they marched in, the children following, and the door closed behind them.Connla and Nora were so dazzled by the light that hit their eyes, when they had crossed the threshold, that they had to shade them with their hands; but, after a moment or two, they became able to bear the splendour, and when they looked around they saw that they were in a noble hall, whose crystal roof was supported by two rows of crystal pillars rising from a crystal floor; and the walls were of crystal, and along the walls were crystal couches, with coverings and cushions of sapphire silk with silver tassels.Over the crystal floor the little pipers marched; over the crystal floor the children followed, and when a door at the end of the hall was opened to let the pipers pass, a crowd of colours came rushing in, and floor, and ceiling, and stately pillars, and glancing couches, and shining walls, were stained with a thousand dazzling hues.Out through the door the pipers marched; out through the door the children followed, and when they crossed the threshold they were treading on clouds of amber, of purple, and of gold.“Oh, Connla,” said Nora, “we have walked into the sunset!”And around and about them everywhere were soft, fleecy clouds, and over their heads was the glowing sky, and the stars were shining through it, as a lady’s eyes shine through a veil of gossamer. And the sky and stars seemed so near that Connla thought he could almost touch them with his hand.When they had gone some distance, the pipers disappeared, and when Connla and Nora came up to the spot where they had seen the last of them, they found themselves at the head of a ladder, all the steps of which were formed of purple and amber clouds that descended to what appeared to be a vast and shining plain, streaked with purple and gold. In the spaces between the streaks of gold and purple they saw soft, milk-white stars. And the children thought that the great plain, so far below them, also belonged to cloudland.They could not see the little pipers, but up the steps was borne by the cool, sweet air the fairy music; and lured on by it step by step they travelled down the fleecy stairway. When they were little more than half way down there came mingled with the music a sound almost as sweet––the sound of waters toying in the still air with pebbles on a shelving beach, and with the sound came the odorous brine of the ocean. And then the children knew that what they thought was a plain in the realms of cloudland was the sleeping sea unstirred by wind or tide, dreaming of the purple clouds and stars of the sunset sky above it.When Connla and Nora reached the strand they saw the nine little pipers marching out towards the sea, and they wondered where they were going to. And they could hardly believe their eyes when they saw them stepping out upon the level ocean as if they were walking upon the land; and away the nine little pipers marched, treading the golden line cast upon the waters by the setting sun. And as the music became fainter and fainter as the pipers passed into the glowing distance, the children began to wonder what was to become of themselves. Just at that very moment they saw coming towards them from the sinking sun a little white horse, with flowing mane and tail and golden hoofs. On the horse’s back was a little man dressed in shining green silk. When the horse galloped on to the strand the little man doffed his hat, and said to the children:“Would you like to follow the nine little pipers?” The children said, “yes.”“Well, then,” said the little man, “come up here behind me; you, Nora, first, and Connla after.”Connla helped up Nora, and then climbed on to the little steed himself; and as soon as they were properly seated the little man said “swish,” and away went the steed, galloping over the sea without wetting hair or hoof. But fast as he galloped the nine little pipers were always ahead of him, although they seemed to be going only at a walking pace. When at last he came up rather close to the hindmost of them the nine little pipers disappeared, but the children heard the music playing beneath the waters. The white steed pulled up suddenly, and wouldn’t move a step further.“Now,” said the little man to the children, “clasp me tight, Nora, and do you, Connla, cling on to Nora, and both of you shut your eyes.”The children did as they were bidden, and the little man cried:“Swish! swash!”And the steed went down and down until at last his feet struck the bottom.“Now open your eyes,” said the little man.And when the children did so they saw beneath the horse’s feet a golden strand, and above their heads the sea like a transparent cloud between them and the sky. And once more they heard the fairy music, and marching on the strand before them were the nine little pipers.“You must get off now,” said the little man, “I can go no farther with you.”The children scrambled down, and the little man cried “swish,” and himself and the steed shot up through the sea, and they saw him no more. Then they set out after the nine little pipers, and it wasn’t long until they saw rising up from the golden strand and pushing their heads up into the sea above, a mass of dark grey rocks. And as they were gazing at them they saw the rocks opening, and the nine little pipers disappearing through them.The children hurried on, and when they came up close to the rocks they saw sitting on a flat and polished stone a mermaid combing her golden hair, and singing a strange sweet song that brought the tears to their eyes, and by the mermaid’s side was a little sleek brown otter.When the mermaid saw them she flung her golden tresses back over her snow-white shoulders, and she beckoned the children to her. Her large eyes were full of sadness; but there was a look so tender upon her face that the children moved towards her without any fear.“Come to me, little one,” she said to Nora, “come and kiss me,” and in a second her arms were around the child. The mermaid kissed her again and again, as the tears rushed to her eyes, she said:“Oh, Nora, avourneen, your breath is as sweet as the wild rose that blooms in the green fields of Erin, and happy are you, my children, who have come so lately from the pleasant land. Oh, Connla! Connla! I get the scent of the dew of the Irish grasses and of the purple heather from your feet. And you both can soon return to Erin of the Streams, but I shall not see it till three hundred years have passed away, for I am Liban the Mermaid, daughter of a line of kings. But I may not keep you here. The Fairy Queen is waiting for you in her snow-white palace and her fragrant bowers. And now kiss me once more, Nora, and kiss me, Connla. May luck and joy go with you, and all gentleness be upon you both.”Then the children said good-bye to the mermaid, and the rocks opened for them and they passed through, and soon they found themselves in a meadow starred with flowers, and through the meadow sped a sunlit stream. They followed the stream until it led them into a garden of roses, and beyond the garden, standing on a gentle hill, was a palace white as snow. Before the palace was a crowd of fairy maidens pelting each other with rose-leaves. But when they saw the children they gave over their play, and came trooping towards them.“Our queen is waiting for you,” they said; and then they led the children to the palace door. The children entered, and after passing through a long corridor they found themselves in a crystal hall so like the one they had seen in the mountain of the golden spear that they thought it was the same. But on all the crystal couches fairies, dressed in silken robes of many colours, were sitting, and at the end of the hall, on a crystal throne, was seated the fairy queen, looking lovelier than the evening star. The queen descended from her throne to meet the children, and taking them by the hands, she led them up the shining steps. Then, sitting down, she made them sit beside her, Connla on her right hand and Nora on her left.Then she ordered the nine little pipers to come before her, and she said to them:“So far you have done your duty faithfully, and now play one more sweet air and your task is done.”And the little pipers played, and from the couches at the first sound of the music all the fairies rose, and forming partners, they danced over the crystal floor as lightly as the young leaves dancing in the wind.Listening to the fairy music, and watching the wavy motion of the dancing fairies, the children fell asleep. When they awoke next morning and rose from their silken beds they were no longer children. Nora was a graceful and stately maiden, and Connla a handsome and gallant youth. They looked at each other for a moment in surprise, and then Connla said:“Oh, Nora, how tall and beautiful you are!”“Oh, not so tall and handsome as you are, Connla,” said Nora, as she flung her white arms round his neck and kissed her brother’s lips.Then they drew back to get a better look of each other, and who should step between them but the fairy queen.“Oh, Nora, Nora,” said she, “I am not as high as your knee, and as for you, Connla, you look as straight and as tall as one of the round towers of Erin.”“And how did we grow so tall in one night?” said Connla.“In one night!” said the fairy queen. “One night, indeed! Why, you have been fast asleep, the two of you, for the last seven years!”“And where was the little mother all that time?” said Connla and Nora together.“Oh, the little mother was all right. She knew where you were; but she is expecting you to-day, and so you must go off to see her, although I would like to keep you––if I had my way––all to myself here in the fairyland under the sea. And you will see her to-day; but before you go here is a necklace for you, Nora; it is formed out of the drops of the ocean spray, sparkling in the sunshine. They were caught by my fairy nymph, for you, as they skimmed the sunlit billows under the shape of sea-birds, and no queen or princess in the world can match their lustre with the diamonds won with toil from the caves of earth. As for you, Connla, see here’s a helmet of shining gold fit for a king of Erin––and a king of Erin you will be yet; and here’s a spear that will pierce any shield, and here’s a shield that no spear can pierce and no sword can cleave as long as you fasten your warrior cloak with this brooch of gold.”And as she spoke she flung round Connla’s shoulders a flowing mantle of yellow silk, and pinned it at his neck with a red gold brooch.“And now, my children, you must go away from me. You, Nora, will be a warrior’s bride in Erin of the Streams. And you, Connla, will be king yet over the loveliest province in all the land of Erin; but you will have to fight for your crown, and days of battle are before you. They will not come for a long time after you have left the fairyland under the sea, and until they come lay aside your helmet, shield, and spear, and warrior’s cloak and golden brooch. But when the time comes when you will be called to battle, enter not upon it without the golden brooch I give you fastened in your cloak, for if you do harm will come to you. Now, kiss me, children; your little mother is waiting for you at the foot of the golden spear, but do not forget to say good-bye to Liban the Mermaid, exiled from the land she loves, and pining in sadness beneath the sea.”Connla and Nora kissed the fairy queen, and Connla, wearing his golden helmet and silken cloak, and carrying his shield and spear, led Nora with him. They passed from the palace through the garden of roses, through the flowery meadow, through the dark grey rocks, until they reached the golden strand; and there, sitting and singing the strange, sweet song, was Liban the Mermaid.“And so you are going up to Erin,” she said, “up through the covering waters. Kiss me, children, once again; and when you are in Erin of the Streams, sometimes think of the exile from Erin beneath the sea.”And the children kissed the mermaid, and with sad hearts, bidding her good-bye, they walked along the golden strand. When they had gone what seemed to them a long way, they began to feel weary; and just then they saw coming towards them a little man in a red jacket leading a coal-black steed.When they met the little man, he said: “Connla, put Nora up on this steed; then jump up before her.”Connla did as he was told, and when both of them were mounted––“Now, Connla,” said the little man, “catch the bridle in your hands, and you, Nora, clasp Connla round the waist, and close your eyes.”They did as they were bidden, and then the little man said, “Swash, swish!” and the steed shot up from the strand like a lark from the grass, and pierced the covering sea, and went bounding on over the level waters; and when his hoofs struck the hard ground, Connla and Nora opened their eyes, and they saw that they were galloping towards a shady wood.On went the steed, and soon he was galloping beneath the branches that almost touched Connla’s head. And on they went until they had passed through the wood, and then they saw rising up before them the “Golden Spear.”“Oh, Connla,” said Nora, “we are at home at last.”“Yes,” said Connla, “but where is the little house under the hill?”And no little house was there; but in its stead was standing a lime-white mansion.“What can this mean?” said Nora.But before Connla could reply, the steed had galloped up to the door of the mansion, and, in the twinkling of an eye, Connla and Nora were standing on the ground outside the door, and the steed had vanished.Before they could recover from their surprise the little mother came rushing out to them, and flung her arms around their necks, and kissed them both again and again.“Oh, children! children! You are welcome home to me; for though I knew it was all for the best, my heart was lonely without you.”And Connla and Nora caught up the little mother in their arms, and they carried her into the hall and set her down on the floor.“Oh, Nora!” said the little mother, “you are a head over me; and as for you, Connla, you look almost as tall as one of the round towers of Erin.”“That’s what the fairy queen said, mother,” said Nora.“Blessings on the fairy queen,” said the little mother. “Turn round, Connla, till I look at you.”Connla turned round, and the little mother said:“Oh, Connla, with your golden helmet and your spear, and your glancing shield, and your silken cloak, you look like a king. But take them off, my boy, beautiful as they are. Your little mother would like to see you, her own brave boy, without any fairy finery.”And Connla laid aside his spear and shield, and took off his golden helmet and his silken cloak. Then he caught the little mother and kissed her, and lifted her up until she was as high as his head. And said he:“Don’t you know, little mother, I’d rather have you than all the world.”And that night, when they were sitting down by the fire together, you may be sure that in the whole world no people were half as happy as Nora, Connla, and the little mother.

## http://www.fairytales247.com/catalog/irish-folktales/skazka-the-golden-spears-450/