# A Year and a Day

When Kathleen did not come home at the time she was expected, her father and her grandmother were not much surprised at first. She was in the habit of going where she pleased and of coming back when she pleased. If she chose to be an hour or two late her father or her grandmother might ask her why, or they might not think of it. So, on that May Eve when she danced with the Good People, as it began to get late and still she did not come, they had no doubt that she had decided to make her visit at the Sullivans' a little longer than she had intended. When it got later and still she did not come, her father said that he would walk over to the Sullivans' and come back with her. He never thought of not finding her there. Even when he got there and Ellen told him that Kathleen had gone away hours ago and had said that she was going home, he did not think that any harm could have come to her."She met some of the girls that she knew and went with them, maybe," he said, "and she'll be home before me."But when he got home again and found that she was not there, and when he told his mother that she was not at the Sullivans', they both began to be a little worried. They told each other over and over that Kathleen knew how to take care of herself and that no harm was likely to come to her, but they both doubted their own words. Late at night John went to the Sullivans' again, taking the way that he thought Kathleen would be likely to take, and looking everywhere for her, though he knew that to search for her in such a way as that was nonsense.The Sullivans had all gone to bed when he got there, but Peter got up and walked back with him, by another way. They went to a police station and asked if there had been any accident—if any girl had been hurt and taken to a hospital. There had been no accident that night. They went home and waited again. At last John could wait no longer. He and Peter started out again and went different ways. They went to other police stations and asked if there had been accidents. There had been one or two, but nobody at all like Kathleen had had[221] anything to do with them. They went to hospitals and asked about all the new patients. There was not one of them that was at all like Kathleen.It does not belong to the story to tell how they went on searching. All the next day they searched. They tried every way that they knew, and every way that the police knew, and every way that anybody could think of, to find her, and there was no trace. Late that day one of the girls who had walked through the Park with Kathleen came to see her, not knowing that she was lost. Then she told where she had seen Kathleen last. She told how Kathleen had dropped behind the others, though she had said that she wanted to get home early, how they had called to her, how she had answered, and how they had gone on, thinking that she would soon follow.Then Mrs. O'Brien said to John: "You do not need to search for her any longer. She is with the Good People. I have seen that place often, and it always looked to me like a place where the Good People might be. Last night was May Eve. There is no time in the whole year when the Good People have more power, and especially to carry off young girls. They have taken her with them. Some time she may come back, or some time we may get her back, but it is of no use for you to search for her any more."But John went on searching still. The next day and for many days he looked for her and tried every means to find her, but she could not be found. Again and again his mother told him that it was of no use, but still he said: "It might be some use, and I wouldn't be easy if I didn't try."By and by there came a time when even John did not think that there was any use in trying longer. He read many papers, from many different cities, hoping always to find something about some unknown girl who had been found, sick or hurt or helpless, somewhere, but he said little about her. He went on with his old work, and he and his mother were alone and lonely in the house. Then John came to believe that Kathleen was dead. He told his mother this and she answered: "Kathleen is not dead.""And how do you know that, mother?" John said. "You always say that the Good People took her away, but that might be true, and still she might be dead by now. And the Good People might not have taken her at all. How do you know?""I don't know that the Good People took her," she answered, "though I think they did; but I am sure she is not dead.""And how are you sure, mother?""Kathleen could never die," Mrs. O'Brien said, "without I'ld hear the banshee.""The banshee?" said John. "There's no banshee here. There's banshees only in Ireland.""Our banshee is here," his mother answered. "I know she is here. You've heard me tell of her. She's the sad, mourning woman of the Good People that weeps and wails about the house when anybody of the family is to die, anywhere in the world. It's true, as you say, that the banshees mostly stay in Ireland, though they are heard to cry and moan for those of the family who are to die in any part of the world. But sometimes the banshee leaves Ireland with the family that she belongs to, and so did ours. Wouldn't I know her voice? Didn't I hear her wail and scream before your father died, so many, many years ago? Oh, I'ld never forget it. I'ld know her voice.""Then why didn't you hear her," John asked "before Kitty died, and why didn't you know before that she was to die?""I did hear the banshee that time," his mother answered, "but I couldn't tell that it was Kitty that was to die. It was the night before she died. I heard a little moan, that was more like the wind than anything else, and then it grew louder, and it was a sob and a soft wail. It did not grow very loud. Then I could hear that it was like the keen that the women cry over the dead at home. I knew that it was the banshee. No, I could not be wrong about her; I had heard her before. But I never thought of Kitty then. I thought: 'I'm an old woman—an old woman—though I would never let them say so; and now my time has come. I shall soon be with him again. If I could only see a child of John's and Kitty's before I go, I'ld go gladly. If I could only say to him: "Before I came to you I held John's and Kitty's child in my arms," then I'ld go gladly.' That was what I said to myself that time. But it was Kitty that the banshee meant. And now, though I felt then the first time that I was an old woman, here I am still, and Kitty is gone and the child is grown up to be a woman and she is lost. But she is not dead, John; she is not dead. Kathleen couldn't die without I'ld hear the banshee."It was not once only that John and his mother talked together in some such way as this. It was a dozen times at least, perhaps two dozen times, that she told him that, whatever had come to Kathleen, she was not dead—that she could not be dead, because the banshee had not moaned and cried about the house, as she was sure to do before any one of the O'Briens could die. And so John, seeing his mother careworn and anxious, but never so full of sorrow as himself, came to think that he ought to bear it better, and not let her see him always so troubled and so sad. Yet he could not believe all that his mother said quite as she believed it, and she had to tell him all of it again and again, and she told him, too, that when the time came she meant to try to get Kathleen back from the Good People. And after a while John did not think every time that he heard anybody at the door that it was Kathleen at last, and all in the house went on as it had gone before, only that Kathleen was not there. But that "only" was enough, and it was a different house.The dreadful spring was past; the horrible, dull, anxious summer was gone; the cruel, chilly autumn went by; the cold, dead, heartless winter dragged through; another spring came, cheerless, hopeless, helpless, like the last."Shaun," said Mrs. O'Brien, "do you know when it was that Kathleen went away?""Could I ever forget?" said John."When was it?""It was May Eve.""And what is to-day, John?""It's the last day of April," John answered; "it's a year this night she's been away. Could I forget it? Don't I think of it all the time?""There's no time in the year," Mrs. O'Brien said, "when the Good People have more power than on May Eve.""Oh, mother," said John, "don't talk to me of the Good People; I've heard too much of them. I don't care if there are any Good People or not. I only know that Kathleen has been from us a year. When her mother died I could bear it, because I had Kathleen left, but now she's gone, and how can I bear it?""Listen to me, John," his mother went on. "It's on May Eve, as I told you, that the Good People have great power. It's then that they dance, and then they make young girls or young men that they want come and dance with them, and then they carry them off. But it's on May Eve, too, sometimes, that they can be got back by those who know what to do. And so it's to-night that we must try to get Kathleen back. I wouldn't tell you till the time came, for fear you might hope too much. We may not find her, and then we may, and you must come with us, for we don't know how much help we'll need.""Who is it that I must come with?" John asked."With me and with the girls that were with Kathleen that night and saw her last.""How do we know that they can come?" said John. "It's late in the day now and they may be away from home.""I've taken care of all that," Mrs. O'Brien said; "they'll be here in a little while to go with us."In a little while the girls came. Then they and Mrs. O'Brien and John went together to the place where Kathleen had met the girls, on her way home from the Sullivans', a year ago. "Was it about this time of the day," Mrs. O'Brien asked, "that you met Kathleen here a year ago to-night?""It was," one of the girls said, "about this time.""Then you must take us," Mrs. O'Brien went on, "just the way that you went, and show us the very place where Kathleen stood, the last instant that you saw her."They all walked along through the Park, the girls leading the way. "How can they find the very place again?" said John. "It's been a year since then. It's likely they have forgot the spot. How could they remember it so long?""John," said his mother, "will you never trust me? Do you think that I've been waiting for them to forget all this time? The very evening after Kathleen was lost they brought me here and then took me to the very spot where they saw her last. They talked of it between themselves and decided just where it was, and many a time since they've been with me here, so that they could not forget it."In a few minutes the girls stopped. "This is the place where we saw her last," they said; "just here. She stood here and seemed to be looking at something there on the grass."Mrs. O'Brien whispered: "Stand still here, all of you, and do not speak or stir unless I call to you; then do whatever I tell you, and do it quickly."Mrs. O'Brien drew out something which was hung about her neck, by a chain, under her gown. She held it before her in her hand. She stepped upon the grass and looked all around her. She went a few steps forward and looked around again. She went a little to the left, then a little more to the right. And then, to those who were watching, it seemed as if she saw something, though they could see nothing but her. For she made a few hurried steps and then put out her left hand, as if to take hold of something. Then they saw her raise her right hand, as if to touch the something that she had taken hold of, with what she held in it. Still they could see nothing except her, but now she hurried toward them, and suddenly they saw that she was leading Kathleen, with her left arm around her and holding her right hand against her forehead."Take her and go home with her," she said to John, "as quickly as you can. The rest of us will follow.""Oh, father," said Kathleen, "I am so glad that you came to meet me! Have you and grandmother been worried about me all day? I was afraid you would be, but the baby needed me, and I couldn't send any word to you. And I promised Terence that I would come back—not Terence Sullivan, but the Terence that lives in there. Please ask some of the Good People to tell him that I will come back to-morrow. Then I will go home with you.""Take her home! Take her home!" her grandmother cried. And John led her away as fast as he could, while the rest followed.No one said anything more till they were at home, for it was only a little way. Kathleen scarcely looked at her father till they came into the house, where it was light. "Why, father," she said, "what makes you look so queer? You look so much older than you did yesterday, and you—oh, I am afraid you were dreadfully worried about me. I didn't think you would be—such a little while. I forgot that you would be worried. There was so much to see there, and then I had to take care of the baby—and so I forgot. It was very wrong for me to forget, and I am so sorry you were anxious about me. But I thought of you and grandmother just as we were coming out to dance to-night, and as soon as we were done dancing I was coming home. And why were you all there where we were dancing? Did you think that I would be there? You ought not to have been afraid, father. It was just such a little while."John did not seem to think anything about its being wrong for Kathleen to forget. He did not seem to think of anything but that she had come back. "Just a little while, do you call it?" he said. "Do you call a year a little while for you to be away from me, Kathleen? And from your grandmother? Don't you see how she has worried about you, too, all this long year? And what could I think but that you was dead? Your grandmother never thought so, but I could think nothing else.""A year!" Kathleen cried. "What do you mean, father? What do you mean? Oh, grandmother, is there anything wrong? Has he been sick? What is it?""Be quiet, John," said Mrs. O'Brien, "and let me talk with Kathleen. Come here, Kathleen. No, there is nothing wrong, dear. Now listen, and answer what I ask you. When did you see your father and me last before to-night?""Why, you know that, grandmother," Kathleen answered. "I saw father yesterday morning, and I saw you yesterday afternoon, when I left you to go to the Sullivans'.""And where have you been since then?" Mrs. O'Brien asked.Kathleen closed her eyes and clasped her hands, as she thought of it. "Oh, it was so wonderful!" she said. "I was inside the hill in the Park. I walked right in there on the water with the Good People. And it was so beautiful there—all gold and silver and jewels—and the music—the music that Terence played! And I must go back. I promised him I would.""And how long were you there?" Mrs. O'Brien asked."All the time," Kathleen said; "all night and all day; I didn't go anywhere else. And when it was time for them all to come out to dance to-night—they were dancing, you know, when I first saw them, and they asked me to dance with them, and then I went into the hill with them. And to-night we came out to dance again, and it was only a little while when you came, and then I saw father, and he brought me home. But I was coming home myself as soon as the dancing was over.""Kathleen," said Mrs. O'Brien, "listen to me now. Don't be frightened, but listen. You've been away from us for a whole year. It was a year ago this night that you danced with the Good People that first time. All this year you have been with them there in the hill. If we had not gone after you to-night, and if I had not known how to bring you back, they would have taken you into the hill for another year, and you might have stayed there, perhaps, as long as you lived.""But, grandmother! A year! Why, you know it was yesterday!""Yesterday was a year ago," her grandmother said. "You can't understand it now. Don't try. You must eat something now, and then you must go to bed. To-morrow I can tell you about it better, and then perhaps you can understand."But Kathleen could not eat. Her going away had been so strange, her coming back had been so wonderful, and what her grandmother had told her had been so marvelous, that she could think of nothing else. By and by she went to her room. While she was undressing she felt something hard in her pocket. She took it out, and it was the little box of ointment that the Queen had given her to put on the baby's eyes. Now that she was at home again she felt as if she had dreamed all that she had seen and heard while she was away. But she had not dreamed it. Here was this little gold box to prove it. Yet she could not believe it. And they told her that she had been away for a year! What they said must be a dream too. But here was the little gold box, just as the Queen had given it to her. It was a green salve that was in it. She would open it and see if there really was a green salve. If there was, then it was not a dream.She opened it. There was the green salve. Yes, it was exactly as she remembered it. And she could remember it all so well. She remembered how the Queen had given it to her, and surely that was last night. She remembered how she had touched the baby's eyes with the salve, and how much brighter they had looked after she had done it. Surely it was only this morning that she did that. It seemed to her all so plain. And they said that it had been a year. She could not understand it at all. She laid the little gold box on her bureau, under her glass, and went to bed.The next morning Kathleen could think about things a little more clearly. She could not remember what she had seen and heard in the hill quite so distinctly. She had not forgotten anything, but it all seemed dimmer in her mind than it had been, as if it were long ago. And still it seemed as if it had all happened yesterday. Everybody whom she knew had heard that she was at home again, and everybody came to see her. And they all told her that she had been away for a year. She could not doubt it any longer, and yet she could not understand it. What had she been doing all that time? She could remember just enough to fill up one night and one day, and that was all. Could it be that she had slept for three hundred and sixty-four days and been awake for only one? No, she could not believe that. And so, at last, she came to her grandmother to ask if she could explain it to her."No," the old woman said, "I can't do that. It's too wonderful for any of us to understand. But it's no more wonderful than many things that are true, and I've heard tales of it before. Often one stays in the land of the Good People, and in other places, too, and thinks that the time has been short, when it has been long. Shall I tell you what happened once to a monk—a holy man—much more wonderful than what happened to you?"One day this monk was in the garden of the monastery where he lived, reading in his book. He was reading in the Psalms, where it says, 'For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past. And as a watch in the night, things that are counted nothing, shall their years be.'"And he found it hard to believe that even to God Himself a thousand years could seem no more than a day. As he was thinking of this, a bird in a tree near him began to sing, and the song was so beautiful that he forgot the psalm that he had been reading and his thoughts about it, and only listened to the bird. It seemed to him that in all his life he had never heard any music so beautiful."But soon the bird flew to another tree, farther from the monastery, and the monk followed, to listen to its song again. Then the bird flew to a tree farther off, and still the monk followed. Once more the bird flew to another tree, and once more the monk followed it, for it seemed to him that as long as that bird sang he could listen to nothing else and could think of nothing else. But he saw that the sun had gone down and he knew that it was time for him to go back to the monastery. As he went back he looked at the colors that the sun had left behind it in the sky, and he thought that they were as beautiful to see as the voice of the bird was to hear."They were all faded and the darkness had come on when he reached the monastery and went in. And if he had wondered at the song of the bird and at the colors in the sky, he wondered yet more when he found himself again in the place where he had lived for many years. For many things about the place were changed, and the men in it were all changed. There was not one face among them that he knew. One of the brothers saw him and came toward him, and he said: 'Brother, why have all these changes been made here since this morning? And who are all these whom I do not know? I scarcely know my own monastery.'"And the other answered: 'Who are you that ask this, and why do you come here? For you wear the dress of our order, but you are a stranger. You speak as if you knew the place, yet I myself have lived here for fifty years and I have never seen you before.'"Then the monk told his name and told how he had been at mass in the chapel in the morning and had then gone into the garden to read. And he told how he had read in the Psalms, 'A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past,' and how, while he was thinking of these words, he had heard the bird singing. He told how he had followed the bird, till he saw that night was coming, and then had come back to the monastery."And the other said: 'I remember now that when I first came into this place they told me of a legend that a monk of your name had gone out of this monastery a hundred and fifty years before, and had never come back and had never been heard of again. And now, counting my own fifty years here, that must have been two hundred years ago.'"Then the monk said: 'God has given me such happiness as He gives to few until they are with Him in Heaven, for these two hundred years have seemed to me to be only a part of a day. Now hear my confession, for I know that I soon shall die.'"So the other monk heard his confession, and before midnight he died. And this was the way that God had chosen to show him the meaning of His word."It was a pretty story, but Kathleen understood no more than before. "No," said her grandmother, "you cannot understand, and I cannot. We live here such a little while and we are so shut in by time, that we cannot understand how it is with those who live always. But we shall understand when the right time comes, and then we shall wonder how we could ever wonder. And I will tell you another story about it, not to make you understand, but to show you how it is."Long ago Finn McCool was the great champion of Ireland. He had many warriors, who were called Fenians. He had a son, Oisin, who was a great warrior, too, and besides that a poet and a minstrel. Some of his poems are left to us yet. One day the Fenians were hunting, when they met a beautiful girl riding on a white horse. She called to Oisin, and he went apart from the others to speak with her."She told him that she was the Princess of Tir-na-n-Oge, and that she had come to take him there, where she was to be married to him. 'Tir-na-n-Oge' means 'Land of the Young,' and they say that nobody ever grows old there. The Princess was as beautiful as moonlight, and her voice was as sweet as the wind blowing on a harp, and Oisin was in love with her and eager to go before she had done speaking."He went back to his father and his companions and bade them farewell. It was with tears that Finn said good-by to Oisin, for I think he knew that he should never see him again. But Oisin did not know. Then Oisin mounted the white horse and set the Princess in front of him, and the horse galloped away toward the west. In a little while they came to the sea, and the horse kept straight on, galloping over the water as if it had been a smooth road. Then some say that the water rose around them and covered them and that they were in a beautiful place under the sea. I am not sure of that. Lands there are under the sea, they say, and no doubt there are, but I am not so sure that the real Tir-na-n-Oge is there."For others say that the tops of blue hills rose before them, and changed to green as they came nearer, and then Oisin saw that soft grass sloped down to the very water here and there, and in other places there were tall cliffs, and trailing vines hung down from the tops of them, covered with bright flowers, and they swung to and fro in the light breeze. Beyond there were more hills, covered with rich woods. Little veils of mist hid them partly and made them more beautiful, and streams poured down from high places and looked like thin, silky tassels hung upon the hills, and they waved in the air, like the waving vines, and some of them seemed never to reach the ground at all, but to blow away into fine silver spray and to mix with the mists of the hills. And golden sunlight poured down over it all, and there was a warm shimmer in the air that made it all look like something seen in a dream. And this was Tir-na-n-Oge."The horse came to the shore and galloped over soft turf till it seemed to Oisin that they were in the very middle of the island, and there they came to a palace, and Oisin thought that it was more beautiful than anything else that he had seen. It may be that the palace was built of marble, but to Oisin it seemed like blocks of pure snow. It was so long that one might well mount his horse to go the length of it, instead of walking. It had gilded domes that looked like suns, with the light shining on them, and the whole palace was dazzling to look at. All around it were gardens, with trees and plants in full bloom, of all the colors of the rainbow, and colors that are not in the rainbow, and other trees with only deep green leaves, and pathways among them which led down into cool, shady hollows, with clear brooks running through them between banks of soft, dark-green moss, sinking their quiet little song."Oisin got down off his horse and then lifted the Princess down, and they went into the palace. There the Princess's father, the King of Tir-na-n-Oge, made Oisin welcome and led both of them to the banquet hall, where a great feast was spread in honor of the Princess and the new Prince. And Oisin thought that if the palace was beautiful outside, it was much more beautiful inside, and as for the table that was before him, he could not think of any of the best things in the world to eat and to drink that were not on it."The next day the Princess was married to Oisin. For a long time Oisin and the Princess lived in the palace and Oisin thought that he never could be more happy than he was now. The old warriors cared much for what they ate and drank, and Oisin ate and drank better things than he had ever tasted before. He walked with the Princess down through the shady ways among the trees and across the brooks and up the hill-sides among the flowers. They sat together in the garden or in the palace and she sang to him and told him wonderful tales of heroes and of princesses of olden times. Sometimes they rode hunting together, and everywhere they found game, the finest that Oisin had ever seen."But at last Oisin began to feel that he cared less for all these things than he had done at first. The grass and the flowers and the woods did not seem so fair to him as they had seemed; the sunshine was not such pure gold; he wished that the silver streams would not blow away in spray and mix with the mists; he wanted to see them come down yellow with the earth of the mountains and plunge into caverns with great rushing and roaring; he felt that the warm air was taking his strength from him; he no longer liked the rich feasts that were spread before him every day; he longed to follow the deer through the woods, with his old friends, to kill it and to cook it and eat it in the woods, and then to sleep there, under the trees and the stars; these trees and these gardens were beautiful, it was true, but they were too beautiful; a hard way through a rough forest would have pleased him better now; he did not love the Princess less, but he longed to see his father and his men again; her singing was no less sweet to him than it had ever been before, but he wished that he could be again where the Fenians, after a hard day's hunt or a hard day's fight, sat about the fire in their stronghold, and listened to one of them—perhaps himself, for he was the best singer of them all—while he sang songs of great heroes and of great fights."And one day, when the Princess had been singing to him, he took her harp from her and sang a song of one of his father's battles, a battle which he had seen himself, where Diarmuid had slain hundreds, and Orcur had slain hundreds, and Erin had been kept from her enemies. Then he said to the Princess: 'Do not think that I am ungrateful for all the happiness that I have had here, but I am longing to see Erin again and to see my father and his men. It is not so beautiful a land as this, but it is my own land, and I am longing to see it. The air here is sweet and the sunshine is warm, but I should like to breathe the mists and to feel the chill again, if I could only see Erin once more!"Mrs. O'Brien stopped a moment, with the way that she had of seeming to look at things far off. Kathleen said nothing when she paused in this way, and in a minute the old woman went on:"'You would not be so happy in Erin as you think,' the Princess answered him. 'This is the best place for you to stay, and it would break my heart for you to go.'"So Oisin said no more then, but the great longing grew upon him, and every day the delights of Tir-na-n-Oge pleased him less. And at last he spoke of it again, and asked the Princess to let him go for a little while. 'You would find Erin changed,' she said, 'and the Fenians are all gone. How long have you been here with me?'"'I cannot tell you to a day,' Oisin answered, 'but I know that it is weeks since I saw my country and my people.'"'You have been here,' said the Princess, 'for three hundred years.'"Oisin could not understand it, but he thought that if he could live so long and not know that the time had passed, the Fenians, too, might be living still, and he begged again to be allowed to go. At last the Princess saw that he would never be happy unless he went, so she brought him the same white horse that had brought them both to Tir-na-n-Oge. 'The horse,' she said, 'will take you to Erin. But you must sit upon his back and never loose his bridle or get down upon the ground. If you touch the ground of Erin you will be at once a weak, old man, you can never come back to Tir-na-n-Oge, you will never see me, and I shall never see you again. Will you promise me, if I will let you go, that you will not get off the horse's back or let go his bridle?'"Oisin promised and she let him go. Away over the water the horse galloped again. Tir-na-n-Oge, with its warm sun and its sweet air, was left behind. A damp sea-wind came up, and it blew the salt spray harshly into Oisin's face as the horse dashed along. It was a joy to him. No more of the soft comforts of that weary island. This was something for a man to face. Yet he did not forget the Princess, and he meant to go back to her when he had seen his land and his people once more. Then the clouds and the fog drifted away and the sun shone out, but still the salt spray covered him, and he felt stronger as he made his way against it and felt the great, free breeze from the east. And now he saw something like a little cloud on the horizon, and it rose higher and grew wider, and then its misty brown faded away and he saw the beautiful green shores of Erin."The old woman paused again and said over softly to herself: "The beautiful—beautiful green shores of Erin.""The horse and the rider soon reached the land now. Oisin rode first to the spot where he had first met the Princess of Tir-na-n-Oge and where he had last seen his father and his companions. He did not think to find them there, but he felt that it was the first place to which he should go. The forest had been cleared away a little, and a strange building stood there. It was a small house, built of stone, and there was a cross on the top of it. Inside he heard a sound of singing. He rode to the door and looked in. There were people kneeling before a man who stood in a higher place than the rest and held up a golden cup."This was something that Oisin did not understand, and he rode away, remembering what the Princess had told him, that he would find Ireland changed. He wondered if he had been wise to come at all. But he went on, and now he rode fast, in this direction and in that, to try to find the Fenians. Sometimes he asked people whom he met if they could tell him of his father. Some of them shook their heads and said that they knew no such person as Finn McCool. Others laughed at him. One or two old men told him that the Fenians had all died long ago and that the man of greatest power in Ireland now was Patrick. It was hard for him to believe. He would have thought himself in a dream, but a dream seems right and true while it lasts, and this seemed all wrong and false. Yet, when he found a place that he knew and looked for some familiar stronghold of the Fenians, he found only a low mound of earth, grown all over with grass, or perhaps with weeds and bushes. And everywhere he saw these houses of stone, with crosses on their tops."Then it came into his mind to find this Patrick of whom he heard so much, and to see what sort of man was now the greatest in Ireland. This was an easier matter than searching for the Fenians. Everyone knew where the holy Patrick was, and soon Oisin came near the place and found that the saint was building another of the stone houses. As Oisin came near he saw some men trying to lift a heavy stone upon a car, to take it to the new building. It almost made him laugh to see how small and weak the men were. He knew well that he could put the stone on the car alone. It was no larger than the stones that the Fenians used to throw for sport."He came near and leaned down from his saddle to lift the stone for the men. He took hold of it and began to raise it, but with the weight the girth of his saddle broke, the saddle slipped around on the horse, Oisin fell, and the horse ran away. Oisin lay there on the ground of Erin, which the Princess had forbidden him to touch, an old man, weak, helpless, blind, hollow-cheeked, wrinkled, white-haired."The men took him up and carried him to St. Patrick, who welcomed him kindly and kept him for a while in his own house. Many times the saint talked with him and tried to make him a Christian, but Oisin could think of nothing but the grand days of the Fenians. When St. Patrick talked with him he would begin to tell of these, and he would make the poems about them that have been kept till now and give us what we know of Finn McCool and his heroes. And these poems Patrick would have written down. And always Oisin was mourning for the brave old days of Finn McCool or for the days of Tir-na-n-Oge, which seemed to him now still farther off."Old as he was now, with the heavy weight of more than three hundred years upon him, blind and weak, there was one thing in which Oisin felt himself a better man that St. Patrick or any of his band. St. Patrick and all those who were with him fasted much, and when they ate it was frugally, of bread and the herbs of the field, and but little meat. But this was not enough for Oisin. He remembered how he and his fellow-huntsmen used to follow the deer and kill it, and dress it, and cook it on the moor in the fresh, cool evening, and feast till it was time to sleep, and then wake and follow the deer again. And so the food which was given to him in St. Patrick's house seemed poor and scanty to him."He said this to the cook and others in the house, and they made sport of him, because so old a man as he should wish to eat so much. Then he told them tales of the days of his father, how great and strong the men of Erin were then, how much more fertile the land was, and of the great beasts and the great trees and plants and vines that it brought forth. In those days, he said, the leg of a lark was as large as a leg of mutton now, a berry of the wild ash was as large as a sheep, and an ivy leaf as broad as a shield."They all laughed at him the more when he said these things, and they did not believe a word of it all. 'Alas!' he said, 'how can I show you that what I say is true? The dear heroes whom I knew are all gone. I am left alone to mourn for them, among men who do not even believe how great they were. Everything that I have found is changed, but there may be something that is not changed. Will one of you go with me in a war chariot and drive where I shall tell him, and let me see if I can find anything as I knew it once?'"Then one of them said that he would go with him. The next morning they set out. Oisin told the man where to drive, till they came to a place where Oisin said: 'Look around you and tell me what you can see on the plain.'"'I see a stone pillar,' the man answered."'Drive the chariot to it,' said Oisin, 'and dig at the foot of the pillar, on the south side of it.'"The man did as Oisin told him, and when he had dug for a while Oisin asked him if he had found anything. 'There is something long and hard here,' said the man, 'like a wooden pole.'"'Dig it out,' said Oisin."The man dug more. 'I have it out now,' he said; 'it is like a great spear, for it has a huge head of rusty iron. I can scarcely lift it.'"'It is a spear such as the Fenians used,' said Oisin. 'Dig still deeper.'"The man dug again. 'Do you find anything more?' said Oisin."'I have found a great horn,' the man answered, 'many times as large as any horn that I ever saw.'"'It is the great war-horn of my father, Finn McCool,' said Oisin. 'Dig deeper.'"The man dug again and said, 'I have found a lump of bog butter.'"'Now blow the horn,' said Oisin."The man was scarcely able to blow the horn, but he did blow it, and it gave forth a harsh, terrible note, which sounded over the plain and was echoed back from the woods and the rocks with a hoarse, dreadful sound."'Look about you,' said Oisin, 'and tell me what you see.'"'Oh, I see,' said the man, 'a great flock of birds coming toward us, and every one of them is many times as large as the largest eagle that I have ever seen. I fear that we cannot escape them and that they will kill us. The dog is nearly dead with terror and he is trying to break his chain.'"'Give him a piece of the bog butter,' said Oisin, 'and let him go. Then tell me what he does.'"'He is running straight toward the birds,' the man answered, 'and they are coming straight toward him and toward us, along the ground. Ah! he has caught one of them, and all the rest have flown away! He has killed the bird! He is rushing back to us, with madness in his eyes and his mouth covered with blood and foam! I fear that he will be worse for us than the birds would have been.'"'Hold the spear straight in front of you as he comes,' said Oisin, 'and let him run upon the point of it and kill him.'"The man held the spear as Oisin told him, and when the dog came on he was caught upon the point of it, and it went through his heart and he fell dead."Then the man went and cut off one of the legs of the bird which had been killed, and they took it with them and started back. As they went they passed a mountain ash which had berries of enormous size, and the man put one of them into the chariot. Then the man saw huge ivy leaves, and he took one of them too. So they went back to St. Patrick's house and showed all the men there what they had brought. The leg of the bird and the berry and the ivy leaf were even larger than Oisin had said. And after that they all believed the stories that Oisin told them, and all of them agreed that a man who had lived in the days when there were such trees and such beasts and such men in Erin should be his own judge as to how much he needed to eat. And so after that all of St. Patrick's men treated him as well as did St. Patrick himself."But Oisin died only a little while after that, the last of the great heroes of Erin. He had lived for more than three hundred years, and it seemed to him no more than the life of a young man."

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