CELTIC TALES

TOLD TO THE CHILDREN

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TOLD TO THE CHILDREN SERIES

EDITED BY LOUEY CHISHOLM

No. 38

CELTIC TALES

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TOLD TO THE CHILDREN BY

LOUEY CHISHOLM

WITH PICTURES BY

KATHARINE CAMERON

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TO

CHRISTOPHER

NOTE

This little book was written after several variants of the Tales had been read:—'Old Celtic Romances,' by Dr. Joyce; 'Reliquæ Celticæ,' by Dr. Cameron; 'The Pursuit after Diarmud O'Duibhne and Grainne the daughter of Cormac Mac Airt,' by Standish Hayes O'Grady; 'The Three Sorrows of Story-telling,' by Dr. Douglas Hyde; 'The Laughter of Peterkin,' by Fiona Macleod, and other translations and retellings. L. C.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

One of my friends tells me that you, little reader, will not like these old, old tales; another says they are too sad for you, and yet another asks what the stories are meant to teach.

Now I, for my part, think you will like these Celtic Tales very much indeed. It is true they are sad, but you do not always want to be amused. And I have not told the stories for the sake of anything they may teach, but because of their sheer beauty, and I expect you to enjoy them as hundreds and hundreds of Irish and Scottish children have already enjoyed them—without knowing or wondering why.

LOUEY CHISHOLM.

LIST OF STORIES

Page

The Star-Eyed Deirdre, ... 1

The Four White Swans, ... 42

Dermat and Grania, ... 74

LIST OF PICTURES

THE STAR-EYED DEIRDRE

'Art thou indeed Deirdre?' . . . . *Frontispiece*

At page

Thence ofttimes in the young summer would they sail southward, ... 26

The Hedge of Spears, ... 38

THE FOUR WHITE SWANS

As she touched Aed, Fiacra, and Conn, the three brothers were as the maid, ... 50

They would swim far out into a dim grey wilderness of waters, ... 60

It was Saint Kemoc, ... 68

DERMAT AND GRANIA

Dermat, ... 82

Grania, ... 112

CELTIC TALES

THE STAR-EYED DEIRDRE

In olden days, when many Kings reigned throughout the Green Island of Erin, none was greater than the great Concobar. So fair was his realm that poets sang its beauty, and such the wonder of his palace that the sweetest songs of Erin were of its loveliness.

In a castle of this fair realm dwelt Felim, a warrior and harper dear unto the King. And it was told him that Concobar with his chief lords would visit the castle.

Then Felim made a feast, and there was great rejoicing, and all men were glad.

But in the midst of the feast an old magician, who was of those that had come with the King, stood up before the great gathering. Long and white was the hair that fell upon his bent shoulders, black were the eyes that gazed into space from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

'Speak,' said the King to the old man, 'speak, and tell us that thou seest, for well we know thou piercest the veil that hideth from us the secrets of the morrow.'

Silently and with great awe did all the company look at the wise old man, for those things that he had already foretold had they not come to pass? The magician, also silent, looked from the face of one to the face of another, but when his eyes fell on Concobar, the King, long did they dwell there, and when he lifted them, on Felim did they rest.

Then the Wise Man spake:

'This night, O Felim the Harper, shall a girl-babe be born to thee within these castle walls. Loveliest among the lovely shall thy star-eyed daughter be; no harp-strings shall yield such music as her voice, no fairy strains pour forth such wonder-stirring sound. Yet, O Felim, in days to come, because of this fair child shall great sorrow come upon our King Concobar and upon all his realm. In those days shall Erin's chief glory perish, for if the House of the Red Branch fall, who shall stand?'

K.C.
ART THOU INDEED DEIRDRE THAT
DEIRDRE OF WHOM I HAVE DREAMED

Then did a cry of fear burst from those gathered to the feast, and leaping to their feet, each man laid his hand upon his sword, for the word that the wise man had spoken would it not come to pass?

'Let our swords be in readiness,' they cried, 'to kill the babe that shall be born this night, for better far is it that one child perish than that the blood of a nation be spilt.'

And Felim spake: 'Great sorrow is mine that fear of the child who shall be born this night should be upon you. Therefore, if it please the King, let my daughter die, and so may peace yet reign in the realm. For dear as would be a child to my wife and to me, dearer yet is the common weal.'

But the answer of King Concobar came not for a time. His soul was filled with desire to see the star-eyed maiden and to hear the wonder of her voice. Still was the hand of each upon his sword when the King spake.

'Put far from thee, O Felim, the will to do this thing. Bend not thy mind to the death of thine own child. And ye, my people, sheathe your swords. Let the babe live. I, Concobar,

will be her guardian, and if ill befall, let it be upon me, your King.'

At these words arose a Prince.

'It would be well, O King, but for the word spoken by the Wise Man, for hath he not said, "Because of this fair child shall great sorrow come upon the King Concobar"? If we let the babe live, then must thy people see thee in sore distress, for the word that the Wise Man speaketh, shall it not come to pass?'

'Of that am I not unmindful. Deep within the forest, beyond the Moor of Loneliness, shall her childish days be spent. Gently tended shall she be, but the eye of man shall not behold her, and solitary shall she live as some unmated bird in distant wilderness.'

Then with one accord did the people cry, 'Wilt thou indeed be guardian to this child, knowing the ill that the Wise Man hath foretold?'

'Yea, truly will I be guardian to the child, and when she be a woman then shall she be my wedded wife. And if with the maiden come sorrow, then be that sorrow upon me, and not upon the land.'

'What sayest thou, O Felim the Harper?' cried the people.

'It were better to slay the child than to let that come which hath been foretold.'

'And what sayest thou, O Wise Man?'

'That which shall come, shall come.'

At the same moment there entered the hall a servant of Felim, and loudly did he proclaim that the girl-babe, who had been foretold, was born. 'Right beautiful and strong is the child, most fair to look upon.'

'And Deirdre shall her name be,' said the Wise Man, 'Deirdre the Star-eyed.'

And because of the words that the King Concobar had spoken, the life of the babe was spared, and when the days of feasting were past, Concobar returned to his palace, and with him he took the infant child and her mother. Yet after a month he bade the mother return to Felim her husband, but the babe Deirdre he kept.

And deep within the forest, beyond the Moor of Loneliness, did the King command that a cottage be built, and when Deirdre was one year, thither was she sent with a trusted

nurse. But on the trees of the forest and throughout the land was proclaimed the order of the King Concobar, that whosoever should hunt, or for other purpose enter the wood, death should be his portion.

Once each week did the King visit the fair babe, and daily were stores of food and milk brought to the lone dwelling. And Deirdre each year grew more fair, but none beheld her beauty, save her nurse, her tutor, and Lavarcam.

This Lavarcam was a woman well trusted of the King, and she alone went to and fro between the palace and the cottage. It was she who told to Deirdre the old tales of knights and ladies, of dragons and of fairies that dwelt in the Enchanted Land.

When Deirdre was seven years old the King no longer came every week to the forest, but twice in the year only, and that as the Spring put forth her first green shoots, and again when Autumn gleaned her harvest of gold.

And when another seven years had sped, then came not the King thither, either when the earth was green or golden, nor in the

blue summer nor the hoary winter, but from Lavarcam he heard that it was well with the maid.

One white winter's morning Deirdre looked from her window, and saw lying in the snow a calf. It had been killed by her nurse to provide food for the little household, and its bright red blood dyed the thick-lying snow. As Deirdre watched the flow of the scarlet stream, a raven, black as night, flew down and drank of the warm blood. Then Deirdre smiled.

'Where are thy thoughts, fair child?' asked Lavarcam, entering the room.

'Only did I think,' said Deirdre, 'that if a youth could be found whose skin was white as snow, his cheek crimson as that pool of blood, and his hair black as the raven's wing, him could I love right gladly.'

Then Lavarcam spake: 'Such a man have I seen, and one only.'

'His name, Lavarcam, his name?' cried Deirdre. 'Whence comes he, and where may he be found?'

'The fairest of three fair brothers is this

Nathos, the son of Usna, and now is he with Concobar the King.'

And Deirdre would thereafter think of none but Nathos, and Lavarcam was much troubled because of the words that she had spoken. And when Deirdre longed grievously by day and night to see this Nathos of whom she had heard, Lavarcam thought of a plan whereby she might end the maiden's dream.

One day, as she came from the palace of the King, she met on the Moor of Loneliness a swineherd and two shepherd lads. And well though she knew that none might enter the forest, she led them to a well in its leafy depths. Then said this woman trusted of the King, 'Wait here by this well until the jay cry and the hill-fox bark. Then move slowly on your way, but speak to none whom ye may meet, and when ye leave the wood let not your lips tell those things ye shall have seen and heard.'

With these words Lavarcam left the three men, and entered the cottage.

'Come, Deirdre,' she cried, 'the crisp snow glistens in the sunshine. Let us wander forth.'

And Deirdre came, and dreamily she trod where Lavarcam led. Of a sudden the older woman left her side, and bent as though she would gather a woodland flower. At the same moment was heard the cry of the jay and the bark of the hill-fox. Then came Lavarcam to the maiden's side.

'Passing strange is it,' said Deirdre, 'to hear the jay cry and the hill-fox bark while yet the snow lies thick.'

'Heed not strange sounds, fair Deirdre, but cast thine eyes toward yonder well.'

And as Deirdre gazed she saw, as in a dream, the forms of three men come slowly through the forest.

'These, Deirdre, are men,' said Lavarcam.

'Yet seem they not as the men I have seen ride by across the Moor of Loneliness, for they were fair to look upon, but mine eyes have no pleasure in beholding these strange forms.'

'Yet you look upon Nathos, for these men are none other than the three sons of Usna.'

Deirdre started. 'Idle are your words, false Lavarcam. Yonder walks not a man with skin white as snow, with cheek crimson as blood,

nor with hair black as the raven's wing. You lie!' And the maid made haste, and she reached the men, and stood before them.

Amazed at her exceeding beauty, they gazed in silence. 'Tell me if ye be the sons of Usna. Speak!'

But in wonder at the loveliness of the maiden, and in fear of the anger of Lavarcam, the men were dumb.

'Speak!' she again cried. 'If indeed ye be Nathos and his brothers, then truly hath Concobar the King my pity.'

At these words the swineherd could no longer keep silence.

'It is thy exceeding beauty that telleth us that thou art that Deirdre whom the King hideth in this forest. Why mock us by asking if we are the fairest of Concobar's nobles? Clearly canst thou see we are but men of the hills, I a poor swineherd, and these men shepherds.'

'Then wilt thou, swineherd, for truly do I believe thy words, get thee to the sons of Usna, and say to Nathos the eldest, that in the forest beyond the Moor of Loneliness, Deirdre awaits

his coming. Tell him that to-morrow, an hour before the setting of the sun, he will find her by this well.'

'If it be known that I so break the law of the King, I die, yet will I go right gladly.'

Then Deirdre left the men, and walked slowly after Lavarcam. And Lavarcam would fain have known what Deirdre had told the swineherd, but the girl told her nought, and was in a dream all that day and all the morrow.

It was in the wane of the morrow that Lavarcam went forth to take counsel of the King. And Deirdre ran with great speed to the well, but no man was there, and she waited long, but none came.

While Deirdre waited by the well, Lavarcam came near to the King's palace. And lo! there, on the ground before her, lay the dead body of the swineherd. Thus was it made known to Lavarcam that in some wise Concobar the King had heard that the swineherd had spoken with Deirdre.

Therefore Lavarcam went not to the palace, but turned aside to the camp of the sons of Usna. And Nathos came out to her, and she

told him of the loneliness of the fair Deirdre and of her longing to see him.

Then said Nathos, 'But it may not be yet awhile, for Concobar found that the fair Deirdre had spoken with the swineherd, and for that cause lies he yonder, a dead man.'

'Yet tarry not long, for if thou wouldst hunt in the forest, beyond the well, then surely wouldst thou see Deirdre the Star-eyed, and none should know.'

Seven days passed, and Deirdre roamed in the wood dreaming her dream, when of a sudden there came an unknown sound. Ah, could it be the hunting-horn of which Lavarcam had spoken in her tales of chase? The maiden paused. The horn ceased. Nathos had left the hunt and wandered through the glade. There, against a background of blue haze, encircled by a network of blossoming blackthorn, shone forth the fairest vision mortal eye had beheld.[1]

Speech tarried as Nathos gazed spell-bound.

At length the maiden questioned, 'Nathos, son of Usna, what wouldst thou?'

[1] See Frontispiece.

'Strange is it that thou shouldst know my name, most fair. No mortal art thou. Fain would I enter yonder cottage, did I but dare, and speak with the daughter of Felim the Harper. Yet it is death should the King know of my desire.'

'I am that Deirdre whom thou seekest, and if I be fair in thine eyes, it pleaseth me well. It is for thee I have watched long, for is not thy skin white as snow, thy cheek crimson as blood, and thy hair black as the raven's wing? Lonely are my days in this place, where none dwells save my nurse, my tutor, and Lavarcam.'

Never did harp-strings yield such music as her voice, never did fairy strains pour forth such wonder-stirring sound.

'Art thou indeed Deirdre the Star-eyed, and is it that King Concobar keepeth thee here like some caged bird?'

'I am Deirdre, and it is the King's will that I wander not forth from yonder cottage but by the side of Lavarcam. Ill would it please him that I should thus roam the forest alone.'

'I love thee, Deirdre, and I would serve thee ever.'

'I love thee, Nathos, and I would that I might be ever by thy side. Let me flee with thee from this place.'

Nathos knit his brows in thought. 'Fair one, if we are seen as we leave the forest, then is it death to us both; and if we are not seen, still is it death, for when it is known of the King that Deirdre is fled, then will the land be searched until she be found, and then shall we die.'

'But, Nathos, Concobar is not King in the land of Alba. Let us flee from Erin, and there in thine own land shall we surely find safety.'

'Thou speakest well, brave Deirdre. If a host be sent from Concobar to Alba, then shall it be met by a host of mine own land. And a fair land it is. Scented with pine and seaweed are its shores, blue as thine eyes are its waters, and of its setting sun the glory cannot be told.'

'Let us go forth,' said Deirdre.

'Then let it be now and without delay, or it may never be,' and as Nathos uttered these words Deirdre saw a strange look in his eyes, and in a moment he had flung his javelin among the bracken but a few paces apart.

'What beast wouldst thou slay?' cried Deirdre, affrighted.

'It was no beast,' said Nathos, 'but yonder among the bracken lieth a dead man, if my javelin missed not its mark.'

In fear and wonder Deirdre ran to the spot. No man lay there, but she saw on the bracken the form of a crouching man. She saw, too, the tracks that marked his escape.

Nathos followed her, and stooped to take his javelin from the ground. And there, beside it, lay a wooden-hilted knife.

'It is as I thought,' he said. 'This knife is used but by the hillmen who are in bondage to Concobar. The King seeketh my life. Go thou, then, back to thy lonely cottage, and await that day when he shall make thee his Queen.'

'Ask me not to turn from following thee, O Nathos, for thy way must be mine, this day and ever.'

'Come, then,' and Nathos took her by the hand.

Through the shadowy forest they walked swiftly, until of a sudden he bade her rest

among the bracken. Then went he forward and told his waiting huntsmen to return by a long and winding path to the castle of the sons of Usna.

Three days would it thus take them to reach it, and Nathos with Deirdre would be there on the morrow, if, tarrying not, they walked on through the dark night. But Concobar's messengers would follow the hounds, thinking so to capture Nathos.

'By dawn, Deirdre, shall we reach the castle, and there may we rest in safety one day and one night. Then must we set out for the hills and lochs of Alba, and with us Ailne and Ardan, for if the King cometh and findeth me fled, then will he slay my brothers.'

On and on they sped, through the forest, across the Moor of Loneliness, up the glens and gorges, and over the hills. Above glimmered the pale stars, around them was the screech and the moan of wakeful bird and beast.

It was not till the dawn broke that they rested on the mountain-side. There they stayed till the pink stole through the grey, and the sky gleamed mother-o'-pearl. Then they

rose and followed the stream that trickled to the valley below. And now Nathos was glad.

'Look, Deirdre, yonder stands the castle of the sons of Usna.' And with that he gave a cry known by the brothers each of the other, and Ailne and Ardan came forth gladly. But when they stood before Deirdre, so great was their wonder at her exceeding beauty, that they stood spell-bound and uttered no word.

Then Nathos spake: 'The fair maiden whom ye behold is none other than Deirdre, the daughter of Felim the Harper. From this day I hold her as my wedded wife, and to you she cometh as a sister.'

But when the brothers heard, they were filled with fear, for had not the King Concobar vowed that this same fair maid should be his Queen? And had not the Wise Man foretold the sorrow that the daughter of Felim should bring upon the land?

'I ask none to share the sorrow that may come,' said Nathos. 'To-morrow Deirdre and I set forth for the bay where our galley is harboured, and if so be that we gain the shores of Alba, before Concobar overtake us, there, if

he come thither, shall he be met by a host of our own land. Yet, lest the King should follow me hither, and, finding me not, seek to slay you, were it not well that ye leave this place?'

Ardan spake: 'Not for fear of that which might come upon us, but for the love we bear you and our fair sister Deirdre will we never leave thee. If sorrow come upon thee, let it be upon us also. Are we not the children of one mother, and if death come, let us face it together like men. Are we not under a bond that we will stand each by each, even unto death?'

Then said Ailne, 'As Ardan hath spoken, so let it be, for although the words of the Wise Man come to pass, and sorrow be upon us, yet will we not henceforth leave thee.'

But when Deirdre heard how the sons of Usna would thus face death for her sake, she sighed aloud. 'Alas! it is not for me to bring sorrow upon the land. Let me even now return to the cottage in the forest, and there with Lavarcam will I live and die, unless it be that Concobar take me thence.'

But Ardan answered: 'For fear of what may befall us, the sons of Usna, shalt thou never leave us, nor shalt thou go forth from us, but of thine own free will.'

Early next morning one hundred and fifty men rode with the three sons of Usna and Deirdre, the wife of Nathos, toward the bay where their black galley was harboured. It was not till night, when on the high ridge of a hill, that they looked backward, and there in the far valley below, where stood the castle of the sons of Usna, they beheld a column of flame.

And Nathos' brow grew dark. 'The fire that ye see in the valley below devours the castle of the sons of Usna. The hand that lit the fire is none other than the hand of Concobar the King.'

Then they rode on and rested not until they reached the black galley in the golden bay. The scent of the sea and the gleam of its blue waters and dancing waves made them strong and glad and free.

As for Deirdre, who had never beheld the sea and its great wonders, she laughed with joy

and sang a song of the ocean which Lavarcam had taught her long since and when its meaning was dark.

At sundown the galley came to the shores of Mull, and because the wind fell they put into a bay, and as they gazed across the waters to the rocky headlands of Alba, they talked long as to whither they should sail on the morrow. Should it be to crave protection of the King, or should it be to where their father's castle had stood before it had been destroyed?

But that night there came a galley from the long island to the north. In it sailed twenty men with their chief. And with the chief came a richly-clad stranger, but so hooded that none might look upon his face.

Steadfastly did the stranger gaze upon Deirdre, as the chief urged the sons of Usna to cross the sea to Alba, and journey inland to the palace of the King.

'But first come, Nathos, to my high-walled castle,' said the stranger, 'and bring with thee thy wife and thy brothers.'

'It were not well to come to a man's castle and know not the man's name,' said Nathos.

'My name is Angus,' answered the stranger.

'Then, Angus, let me behold thy face, for it were not well to come to a man's castle, having not looked upon the man's face.'

So Angus threw back his hood, and Nathos saw that Deirdre's lips grew white, as she said, 'Not to-morrow, Angus; but on the morn that follows, if thou wilt come again, then shalt thou lead us to thy high-walled castle. This day have we travelled far and would fain rest.'

But Angus turned him again to the sons of Usna and pleaded that they should linger no longer in the isle. 'To-night may this island be tempest-swept, to-night may the host of Concobar be upon you, and then what shall befall this fair one? Bring her rather to my castle, and there let her rest in safety with my wife and her maidens.'

But as Nathos glanced at Deirdre, he saw that her purpose was firm, and he said once again the words she had spoken, 'Not to-morrow, Angus; but on the morn that follows, if thou wilt come again, then shall we come with thee to thy high-walled castle.'

Then Angus, frowning, went with the chief and his men to their galley. And as they set sail he asked how many men the sons of Usna had with them. But when it was told him that they numbered one hundred and fifty, he said no more, for there were but thirty that sailed with the chief, and what could one man do against five?

It was not until the strangers had gone that Nathos asked Deirdre wherefore she delayed to visit so great a lord as Angus.

'Thou shalt hear wherefore I went not this day, nor shall go on any day to come to the castle of him who calleth himself Angus. So he calleth himself, but in truth he is none other than the King of Alba. In a dream was it so revealed unto me, when I saw him stand victorious over your dead body. Nathos, that man would fain steal me from you, and deliver you into the hands of Concobar.'

'Deirdre hath wisdom,' said Ardan. 'By the morn after to-morrow we must be far hence, for ere the sun shall rise may not yonder chief be upon us with thrice the number of our men?'

And Nathos, though he was sore grieved for

the weariness of Deirdre, bowed his head. So they set sail, and through the thick mist of a starless night their galley silently breasted the unseen waves. But when they came north of the long island, they bent to their oars, and as they rowed yet northward Deirdre laughed again for joy, as she listened to the music of the rowers' strokes.

When dawn glimmered they came to a sea-loch, its waters o'ershadowed by the sleeping hills. And there they were told that the King of Alba, who had called himself Angus, had no castle in the west, and had already left for Dunedin. They heard, too, that the chief who sailed with him to Mull was no longer a great lord, and that they had nought to fear.

Greatly did the sons of Usna rejoice, for now might they sail south to the land upon which their father's castle had stood in their boyhood.

But for eight days they lingered by the shores of the sea-loch, and as its salt breath touched Deirdre's cheeks, she grew yet more fair, and as her eyes drank in the glory of Western Alba, they shone with a radiance that dazzled the beholder.

Then when the eighth day was come, they sailed forth and settled close by the ground on which had stood their boyhood's home. And it was with great joy that those who dwelt on hill and shore heard of the return of the sons of Usna, and many gathered around them, doing homage.

Then the hundred and fifty men whom Nathos had brought with him, sent he back to their own Green Isle.

'And thou, Ailne, and thou, Ardan, will ye not also return? Here may Deirdre and I, with a few followers, dwell alone in safety.'

But his brothers would not leave Nathos, for were they not under a bond that they would stand each by each, even unto death?

All through the winter they dwelt in peace and content. By day they would hunt and fish, and when night fell Deirdre let fall from her lips such wonder-stirring sounds that their heroic bosoms swelled with dreams of noble deeds and high endeavour.

But when Spring burst upon the land with her blossom and her singing-birds, it was told the sons of Usna that the King of Alba had

sworn to burn to the ground every stone that stood on the land that had been their father's, and to slay Nathos, and wed the Star-eyed Deirdre.

So in their great galley they set forth, taking with them fifty men. Northward they sailed, through narrow sea-lochs, until they reached the mountains that had been the childhood's home of their dead mother.

On the summit of a high hill stood the castle where she had once dwelt. Now it was forsaken of all save wandering shepherds and nesting birds, and here, in all the glory of spring, did the sons of Usna make their home. Nor was it long before the chiefs of the mountain-lands swore allegiance to Nathos and did him homage, and he was as a king among the people of his mother's land.

And while yet the wild thyme bloomed, word was brought to the sons of Usna that the King of Alba was dead, and that the King who now reigned would fain sign a bond of friendship with Nathos and his brothers.

And the bond was signed, and for three years the sons of Usna dwelt in peace and great

joy. In the north they rested while yet the mountain-sides were aglow with the purple and gold of heather and bracken, but ever before the first frosts came would they sail south to the land that the brave Usna had ruled, where now they could dwell in safety and in peace.

Thence ofttimes in the young summer would they sail southwards. No bluer blue, no greener green, had it been given mortal eye to behold. And throughout the land of Alba was it told of the fame of the sons of Usna, and no poet or bard had a song so fair as that which sang of the wondrous beauty of Deirdre.

In his dazzling palace in the Green Isle of Erin, Concobar dwelt with gloomy thoughts of vengeance. This Nathos who had stolen Deirdre from the forest beyond the Moor of Loneliness should no longer be suffered to live in peace. He should surely die, and Deirdre the Star-eyed should yet be Concobar's Queen.

And the King made a feast so magnificent that such had never been seen in the Green

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Isle. And to it were called all the princes and nobles of the land over which Concobar held sway.

It was in the midst of the feast, as they sat around the board, that a hush fell upon the great company, while Concobar spoke to them of his discontent. 'It is not meet that these three heroes of the realm, Nathos, Ardan and Ailne, should be exiled from our isle for the sake of a woman, be she fair as May. Should dark days befall, sore would be our need, therefore let the sons of Usna be brought hither from their northern mountain home.'

At these words great was the joy of all, for there was not one but knew that it was for fear of the pitiless anger of Concobar that Nathos had fled from the Green Isle.

'Go forth,' said Concobar, when he saw the gladness of the people, 'go hence to Alba and come not again until ye bring with you the three sons of Usna.'

Then spake one among them, 'Right gladly we go, but who can bring to thee Nathos, if it be not his will?'

'He who loves me most,' answered the King, 'he it is that will fail not to bring with him the exiled heroes.'

And after the feast the King drew aside a warrior prince, and spake thus: 'Were I to send thee to Alba to the sons of Usna, and if at my command thou didst see them slain before thee, what then wouldst thou do?'

'Then, O King, would I slay those who did the monstrous deed, even were it at thy command.'

Again the King called to him a warrior prince. To him he spake as to the first. And this prince made answer, 'If by thy command I saw the sons of Usna lie dead before me, then woe be upon thee, for with mine own hand should I take thy life.'

Then spake the King likewise to Fergus, and Fergus answered, 'Let what may befall the sons of Usna, never shall my hand be lifted against the King.'

'To thee, good Fergus, do I intrust this thing. Go thou to Alba and bring hither with thee Nathos, and Ailne, and Ardan. And when thou art come again to Erin, keep thou

thy bond to feast at the house of Borrach, but the three sons of Usna send thou straightway hither.'

So it was that on the morrow Fergus set sail in a black barge for Alba, taking with him but his two sons and a steersman.

The bloom of early summer made bright the earth, and Nathos and his brothers had not yet left their father's home for the castle in the north. But the days were hot, and they had pitched three tents on the seashore, one for Nathos and Deirdre, one for Ailne and Ardan, and one in which to eat and to drink. It was on a bright noon that Nathos and Deirdre sat before the tents, playing chess.

The chess-board was of ivory, the chess-men were of wrought gold, and they had belonged to Concobar, for on the day before the sons of Usna fled from Alba, the King had been hunting by their castle, and there had he left the board and men.

As Nathos and Deirdre played, of a sudden was a cry heard from adown the shore.

'Yonder is the voice of a man of Erin,' said Nathos, as they paused in their game.

Again a loud cry, and the sons of Usna were called by name.

'Yea, most truly is that the cry of a man of Erin.'

But Deirdre said, 'Nay, thou dreamest, Nathos. Let us play on.'

Then nearer and clearer came a third cry, and there was none but knew that it was indeed the voice of a man of Erin.

'Go, Ardan,' said Nathos, 'go to the harbour, and there welcome Fergus from the Green Isle, for he indeed it is and none other.'

But when Ardan went, Nathos saw that Deirdre's lips grew pale and a great fear looked out from her eyes.

'What terror is it that hath hold of thee?' he asked.

'Hath it not been revealed to me in a dream, O Nathos, that this Fergus who should come with honey-sweet words hath in his mind the shedding of our blood?'

Even as she spake Ardan led Fergus to where the two sat on either side of the chess-board.

Eagerly did the exiled sons of Usna beg for tidings of their friends in the Green Isle.

'I come to you,' said Fergus, 'with greetings from Concobar the King. Fain would he see once more in Erin the fairest and bravest heroes of his realm. Peace he would pledge with you, and great shall be your welcome, if ye will come back with me.'

But before the brothers could answer, Deirdre spake. 'Here in Alba is Nathos now lord over lands wider than the realm of Concobar. Wherefore then should he seek forgiveness of the King?'

'Yet,' replied Fergus, 'Erin is the land of his adoption. Since his boyhood's days Nathos has been a hero in the Green Isle, and it were well that he should yet rejoice in the land, and, if need be, defend it still.'

'We have two lands,' said Ardan, 'and both are dear unto us. Yet, if Nathos will go with thee to Erin, so also will Ailne and I, myself.'

'I will go,' said Nathos, but he looked not at his star-eyed wife as he spake the words.

That night all rejoiced save Deirdre. Heavy was her heart as she thought she would never again, in shadow or in sunlight, rest in the land of Alba of the lochs.

On the morrow they set sail, and swiftly the galley bore them to the shores of the Green Isle. And when Deirdre stood once more on the soil of her own land, then was her heart glad, and for a brief space she remembered not her fears or her dreams.

In three days they came to the castle of Borrach, and there had Fergus to keep his bond to feast with Borrach. 'For,' he said, turning to those with him, 'my feast-bond I must keep, yet send I with you my two sons.'

'Of a surety, Fergus, must thou keep thy feast-bond,' answered Nathos, 'but as for thy sons, I need not their protection, yet in the company each of the other will we fare southward together.'

But as they went, Deirdre urged that they should tarry, and when they had gone further, Nathos found that his wife had vanished from his side. Going back he found her in deep sleep by the wayside.

Gently waking her, Nathos read terror in her starry eyes.

'What aileth thee, my Queen?'

'Again have I dreamed, O Nathos, and in

my dream I saw our little company, but as I looked, on the younger son of Fergus alone, was the head left upon his body. Turn aside, and let us go not to Concobar, or that thing which I saw in my dream, it shall come to pass.'

But Nathos feared not, for had not Fergus come to them with the bond of peace from the King?

And on the morrow they came to the great palace.

When it was told Concobar that the three sons of Usna and Deirdre the Star-eyed, and the two sons of Fergus were without, he ordered that they should be taken into the House of the Red Branch. And he ordered, too, that there should be given unto them of pleasant foods, and that all that dwelt in the castle should do them honour.

But when evening was come, and all the company was merry, Deirdre was wearied with journeying, and she lay upon a couch draped with deerskins, and played with Nathos upon the gold and ivory chess-board.

And as Deirdre rested, the door opened, and there entered a messenger from the King.

And this messenger was none other than Lavarcam, who had been sent to discover if Deirdre were still as fair as in days of old. And when Lavarcam beheld Deirdre, her eyes filled with tears. 'You do not well, O Nathos, thus to play upon the chess-board which Concobar holds dearer than aught else save Deirdre, thy wife. Both have ye taken from him, and here, within these walls, are ye now in his power.'

Of a sudden Deirdre spake, her gaze fixed as if on some strange thing. 'I see as in a dream. As in a dream I see three torches. The three torches are this night put out. The names on the torches are Nathos, Ailne, Ardan. Alas! it is but for the beauty of a woman that these brave ones perish.'

The sons of Usna were silent awhile, and the sons of Fergus spake not. Then said Nathos, 'It were better, Deirdre, to be a torch quenched for thy sake than to live for aught save thee. That which shall come, shall come.'

'Now must I get me hence,' said Lavarcam, 'for Concobar awaiteth my coming. But, sons of Usna, see ye well to it, that the doors and windows be this night barred.'

Then Lavarcam hastened to the King and told him how that the sons of Usna had come to Erin to live peaceably, but how that the beauty of Deirdre had faded until she was no longer fairest among women.

Then was Concobar wroth, and he sent yet another messenger.

To this man he said, 'Who was it that slew thy father and thy brother?'

'Nathos, son of Usna, O King!'

'Then go thou to the House of the Red Branch, and bring me word hither if Deirdre be still the fairest among women.'

And the man went. But when he found that bar and bolt were drawn across door and window, he knew well that the sons of Usna were warned of the wrath of the King. But espying one open window, he put his eye near to the lower corner that he might glance within. And Deirdre saw the man's eye, and told Nathos, and he, with the ivory bishop that was in his hand, took aim as if with a javelin, and the chessman pierced the spy's eye, and it became blind.

And the man returned to King Concobar and

said, 'Of a surety Deirdre, the wife of Nathos, is yet of all fair women the most fair.'

Then could not Concobar contain his wrath, but burst forth, 'Arise, ye Ultonians; the fort that surroundeth the House of the Red Branch set ye in flames.'

And the Ultonians set it in flames.

Then came out the younger of the sons of Fergus from the burning fort, and he rushed upon the Ultonians and killed three hundred men. And when King Concobar beheld the onslaught, he cried aloud, 'Who hath done this thing?'

And when it was told him that it was the son of Fergus, he said, 'To such a hero will I give the choice of lands, and he will be to me as a son, if he will but forsake the sons of Usna.'

And the son of Fergus made answer, 'I swear to abide by thee and to return not to the House of the Red Branch.'

And when he returned not, Deirdre said, 'Even as Fergus hath deceived us, even so hath his son.'

Then went forth the elder son of Fergus, and he fell upon the Ultonians, and there perished

by his hand three hundred men. And when Concobar saw who it was that had done this thing, he called his own son, who had been born the same night as this son of Fergus. 'Take these, my magic arms,' he cried, 'and fall upon the foe.'

Then did the son of Concobar strike with his enchanted weapons, and all the waves of Erin thundered at the stroke. And a great warrior, hearing the thunder, came riding across the plain, and in his hand he held a magic sword with blade of blue. Coming upon the fighting men, he rushed at the son of Fergus from behind, and thrust the blue blade through his heart. 'I would that mine enemy had fought me fair,' said the dying man.

'Who art thou?' asked the stranger.

And the son of Fergus told his name, and of that which had come to pass in the House of the Red Branch.

Then answered the stranger, 'I shall not depart hence, no, not until the son of Concobar be slain in the dust'; and thereupon he rushed upon the King's son, and with one stroke of the blue blade severed his head from his body.

So he departed, and soon the son of Fergus also lay dead.

And now the Ulstermen surrounded the House of the Red Branch and set fire to its walls. But Ardan came forth, and put out the fire, and slew three hundred men, and after he had gone in, then came Ailne forth, and slew a countless multitude beside.

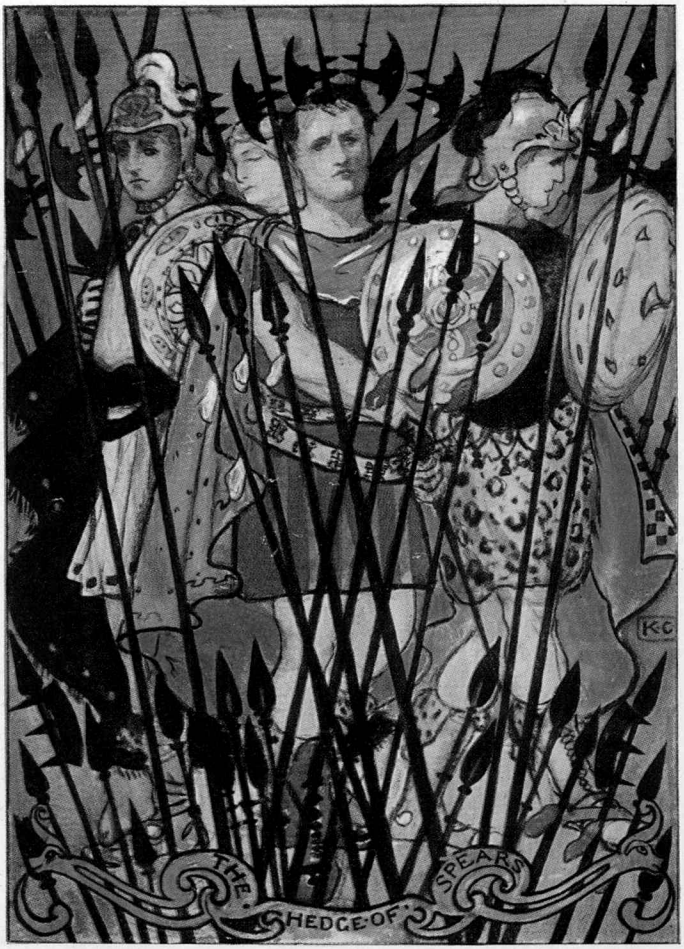
A glimmering ray of dim grey light now broke, and spread over the forms of dead and dying men.

It was at that hour that Nathos kissed Deirdre and went forth from the House. And there was not a man but quailed as the hero rushed upon the Ultonians and slew a thousand men.

When Concobar heard this, he sent for that Wise Man who in the house of Felim the Harper had foretold the sorrow that would come upon his realm.

And when the old man had come, Concobar said, 'I swear that I mean no harm unto the sons of Usna, yet will they slay every Ultonian in the land. Therefore I would that thou wouldst help me by thy magic power.'

And the Wise Man believed the words of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THE HEDGE OF SPEARS

Concobar, and he caused a hedge of spears to encircle the burning House. And as the flames rose higher the sons of Usna came forth with Deirdre the Star-eyed. And around her they placed their shields, and they cleft a way through the Hedge of Spears and came safely to the plain beyond.

But when the Wise Man saw that his magic availed nought, he laid upon the land yet another enchantment, for the plain upon which Deirdre stood with the sons of Usna, he caused to be covered with tempestuous water.

And the magic sea rose higher and yet more high, so that Nathos raised Deirdre on his shoulder, and there she rested, her white arms around the hero's neck.

But now the waters grew calm, and it was seen that drowning was not their doom.

Then, as the waters withdrew from the plain, soldiers came to bind Nathos, Ailne, and Ardan, and to take them before the King. And Concobar commanded that they should be slain before his eyes.

'If such be our doom, then slay me first,' said Ardan, 'for I am the youngest of Usna's sons.'

'Nay,' said Ailne, 'but let the first blow fall upon me.'

Then Nathos spake: 'It were not meet that we three, the sons of one mother, should be divided in death. Together have we sowed the seeds in the springtime, side by side have we plucked the fruits of summer; autumn is still afar, yet must we be cut down as ripe corn. But let us fall each by each, that there may not be left the one to mourn the other. With this sword that was given me by a hero of the land may our heads at one stroke be severed from our bodies.'

With that they laid their heads upon the block. A flash of the steel, and Alba was bereft of the fairest and noblest of her sons. And the air was rent with cries of lamentation.

Then did a great champion ride across the plain, and to him did Deirdre tell of the fate of the sons of Usna. And under his care the star-eyed maiden came where the heroes lay dead.

And Deirdre kneeled, and she bent low over the head of Nathos, and kissed his dead lips.

Then, at the bidding of the champion, three graves were digged, and in them, standing up-

right, were buried Nathos and Ailne and Ardan, and upon the shoulders of each was his head placed.

And as Deirdre gazed into the grave of Nathos, she moaned a lay which told of the brave deeds of the sons of Usna. It told, too, of her love for Nathos, and as she ended the mournful strain, her heartstrings broke, and she fell at the feet of her husband, and there did she die, and by his side was she buried.

In that same hour died the Wise Man; and as he died, he cried aloud, 'That which shall come, shall come.'

And so it was, for on the morrow Concobar's host was scattered as autumn leaves, and the House of the Red Branch perished, and ere long Concobar died in a madness of despair, and throughout the Green Isle was mourning and desolation.

But through the ages has the tale of the wondrous beauty of Deirdre been sung, and yet shall it be told again, for when shall the world tire of the sorrowfullest of 'The Three Sorrows of Story-telling,'—the Fate of the Sons of Usna and of Deirdre the Star-eyed?

THE FOUR WHITE SWANS

In the days of long ago there lived in the Green Isle of Erin a race of brave men and fair women—the race of the Dedannans. North, south, east, and west did this noble people dwell, doing homage to many chiefs.

But one blue morning after a great battle the Dedannans met on a wide plain to choose a King. 'Let us,' they said, 'have one King over all. Let us no longer have many rulers.'

Forth from among the Princes rose five well fitted to wield a sceptre and to wear a crown, yet most royal stood Bove Derg and Lir. And forth did the five chiefs wander, that the Dedannan folk might freely say to whom they would most gladly do homage as King.

Not far did they roam, for soon there arose a great cry, 'Bove Derg is King. Bove Derg is King.' And all were glad, save Lir.

But Lir was angry, and he left the plain where the Dedannan people were, taking leave of none, and doing Bove Derg no reverence. For jealousy filled the heart of Lir.

Then were the Dedannans wroth, and a hundred swords were unsheathed and flashed in the sunlight on the plain. 'We go to slay Lir who doeth not homage to our King and regardeth not the choice of the people.'

But wise and generous was Bove Derg, and he bade the warriors do no hurt to the offended Prince.

For long years did Lir live in discontent, yielding obedience to none. But at length a great sorrow fell upon him, for his wife, who was dear unto him, died, and she had been ill but three days. Loudly did he lament her death, and heavy was his heart with sorrow.

When tidings of Lir's grief reached Bove Derg, he was surrounded by his mightiest chiefs. 'Go forth,' he said, 'in fifty chariots go forth. Tell Lir I am his friend as ever, and ask that he come with you hither. Three fair foster-children are mine, and one may he yet

have to wife, will he but bow to the will of the people, who have chosen me their King.'

When these words were told to Lir, his heart was glad. Speedily he called around him his train, and in fifty chariots set forth. Nor did they slacken speed until they reached the palace of Bove Derg by the Great Lake. And there at the still close of day, as the setting rays of the sun fell athwart the silver waters, did Lir do homage to Bove Derg. And Bove Derg kissed Lir and vowed to be his friend for ever.

And when it was known throughout the Dedannan host that peace reigned between these mighty chiefs, brave men and fair women and little children rejoiced, and nowhere were there happier hearts than in the Green Isle of Erin.

Time passed, and Lir still dwelt with Bove Derg in his palace by the Great Lake. One morning the King said, 'Full well thou knowest my three fair foster-daughters, nor have I forgotten my promise that one thou shouldst have to wife. Choose her whom thou wilt.'

Then Lir answered, 'All are indeed fair, and choice is hard. But give unto me the eldest, if it be that she be willing to wed.'

And Eve, the eldest of the fair maidens, was glad, and that day was she married to Lir, and after two weeks she left the palace by the Great Lake and drove with her husband to her new home.

Happily dwelt Lir's household and merrily sped the months. Then were born unto Lir twin babes. The girl they called Finola, and her brother did they name Aed.

Yet another year passed and again twins were born, but before the infant boys knew their mother, she died. So sorely did Lir grieve for his beautiful wife that he would have died of sorrow, but for the great love he bore his motherless children.

When news of Eve's death reached the palace of Bove Derg by the Great Lake all mourned aloud for love of Eve and sore pity for Lir and his four babes. And Bove Derg said to his mighty chiefs, 'Great indeed is our grief, but in this dark hour shall Lir know

our friendship. Ride forth, make known to him that Eva, my second fair foster-child, shall in time become his wedded wife and shall cherish his lone babes.'

So messengers rode forth to carry these tidings to Lir, and in time Lir came again to the palace of Bove Derg by the Great Lake, and he married the beautiful Eva and took her back with him to his little daughter, Finola, and to her three brothers, Aed and Fiacra and Conn.

Four lovely and gentle children they were, and with tenderness did Eva care for the little ones who were their father's joy and the pride of the Dedannans.

As for Lir, so great was the love he bore them, that at early dawn he would rise, and, pulling aside the deerskin that separated his sleeping-room with theirs, would fondle and frolic with the children until morning broke.

And Bove Derg loved them well-nigh as did Lir himself. Ofttimes would he come to see them, and ofttimes were they brought to his palace by the Great Lake.

And through all the Green Isle, where dwelt the Dedannan people, there also was

spread the fame of the beauty of the children of Lir.

Time crept on, and Finola was a maid of twelve summers. Then did a wicked jealousy find root in Eva's heart, and so did it grow that it strangled the love which she had borne her sister's children. In bitterness she cried, 'Lir careth not for me; to Finola and her brothers hath he given all his love.'

And for weeks and months Eva lay in bed planning how she might do hurt to the children of Lir.

At length, one midsummer morn, she ordered forth her chariot, that with the four children she might come to the palace of Bove Derg.

When Finola heard it, her fair face grew pale, for in a dream had it been revealed unto her that Eva, her step-mother, should that day do a dark deed among those of her own household. Therefore was Finola sore afraid, but only her large eyes and pale cheeks spake her woe, as she and her brothers drove along with Eva and her train.

On they drove, the boys laughing merrily,

heedless alike of the black shadow resting on their step-mother's brow, and of the pale, trembling lips of their sister. As they reached a gloomy pass, Eva whispered to her attendants, 'Kill, I pray you, these children of Lir, for their father careth not for me, because of his great love for them. Kill them, and great wealth shall be yours.'

But the attendants answered in horror, 'We will not kill them. Fearful, O Eva, were the deed, and great is the evil that will befall thee, for having it in thine heart to do this thing.'

Then Eva, filled with rage, drew forth her sword to slay them with her own hand, but too weak for the monstrous deed, she sank back in the chariot.

Onward they drove, out of the gloomy pass into the bright sunlight of the white road. Daisies with wide-open eyes looked up into the blue sky overhead. Golden glistened the buttercups among the shamrock. From the ditches peeped forget-me-not. Honeysuckle scented the hedgerows. Around, above, and afar, carolled the linnet, the lark, and the thrush. All was colour and sunshine, scent

and song, as the children of Lir drove onward to their doom.

Not until they reached a still lake were the horses unyoked for rest. There Eva bade the children undress and go bathe in the waters. And when the children of Lir reached the water's edge, Eva was there behind them, holding in her hand a fairy wand. And with the wand she touched the shoulder of each. And, lo! as she touched Finola, the maiden was changed into a snow-white swan, and behold! as she touched Aed, Fiacra, and Conn, the three brothers were as the maid. Four snow-white swans floated on the blue lake, and to them the wicked Eva chanted a song of doom.

As she finished, the swans turned towards her, and Finola spake:

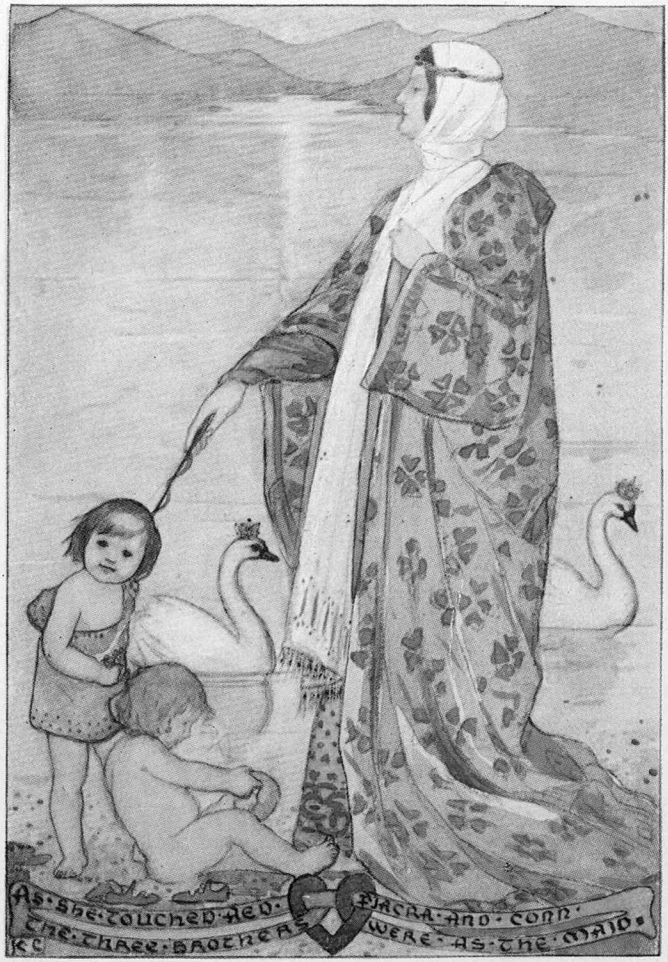
'Evil is the deed thy magic wand hath wrought, O Eva, on us the children of Lir, but greater evil shall befall thee, because of the hardness and jealousy of thine heart.' And Finola's white swan-breast heaved as she sang of their pitiless doom.

The song ended, again spake the swan-

maiden. 'Tell us, O Eva, when death shall set us free.'

And Eva made answer, 'Three hundred years shall your home be on the smooth waters of this lone lake. Three hundred years shall ye pass on the stormy waters of the sea betwixt Erin and Alba, and three hundred years shall ye be tempest-tossed on the wild Western Sea. Until Decca be the Queen of Largnen, and the good Saint come to Erin, and ye hear the chime of the Christ-bell, neither your plaints nor prayers, neither the love of your father Lir, nor the might of your King, Bove Derg, shall have power to deliver you from your doom. But lone white swans though ye be, ye shall keep for ever your own sweet Gaelic speech, and ye shall sing, with plaintive voices, songs so haunting that your music will bring peace to the souls of those who hear. And still beneath your snowy plumage shall beat the hearts of Finola, Aed, Fiacra and Conn, and still for ever shall ye be the children of Lir.'

Then did Eva order the horses to be yoked to the chariot, and away westward did she drive.


AS·SHE·TOUCHED·AED·
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And swimming on the lone lake were four white swans.

When Eva reached the palace of Bove Derg alone, greatly was he troubled lest evil had befallen the children of Lir.

But the attendants, because of their great fear of Eva, dared not to tell the King of the magic spell she had wrought by the way. Therefore Bove Derg asked, 'Wherefore, O Eva, come not Finola and her brothers to the palace this day?'

And Eva answered, 'Because, O King, Lir no longer trusteth thee, therefore would he not let the children come hither.'

But Bove Derg believed not his foster-daughter, and that night he secretly sent messengers across the hills to the dwelling of Lir.

When the messengers came there, and told their errand, great was the grief of the father. And in the morning with a heavy heart he summoned a company of the Dedannans, and together they set out for the palace of Bove Derg. And it was not until sunset as they

reached the lone shore of Lake Darvra, that they slackened speed.

Lir alighted from his chariot and stood spell-bound. What was that plaintive sound? The Gaelic words, his dear daughter's voice more enchanting even than of old, and yet, before and around, only the lone blue lake. The haunting music rang clearer, and as the last words died away, four snow-white swans glided from behind the sedges, and with a wild flap of wings flew toward the eastern shore. There, stricken with wonder, stood Lir.

'Know, O Lir,' said Finola, 'that we are thy children, changed by the wicked magic of our step-mother into four white swans.' When Lir and the Dedannan people heard these words, they wept aloud.

Still spake the swan-maiden. 'Three hundred years must we float on this lone lake, three hundred years shall we be storm-tossed on the waters between Erin and Alba, and three hundred years on the wild Western Sea. Not until Decca be the Queen of Largnen, not until the good Saint come to Erin and the chime of the Christ-bell be heard in the land,

not until then shall we be saved from our doom.'

Then great cries of sorrow went up from the Dedannans, and again Lir sobbed aloud. But at the last silence fell upon his grief, and Finola told how she and her brothers would keep for ever their own sweet Gaelic speech, how they would sing songs so haunting that their music would bring peace to the souls of all who heard. She told, too, how, beneath their snowy plumage, the human hearts of Finola, Aed, Fiacra, and Conn should still beat—the hearts of the children of Lir. 'Stay with us to-night by the lone lake,' she ended, 'and our music will steal to you across its moonlit waters and lull you into peaceful slumber. Stay, stay with us.'

And Lir and his people stayed on the shore that night and until the morning glimmered. Then, with the dim dawn, silence stole over the lake.

Speedily did Lir rise, and in haste did he bid farewell to his children, that he might seek Eva and see her tremble before him.

Swiftly did he drive and straight, until he

came to the palace of Bove Derg, and there by the waters of the Great Lake did Bove Derg meet him. 'Oh, Lir, wherefore have thy children come not hither?' And Eva stood by the King.

Stern and sad rang the answer of Lir. 'Alas! Eva, your foster-child, hath by her wicked magic changed them into four snow-white swans. On the blue waters of Lake Darvra dwell Finola, Aed, Fiacra, and Conn, and thence come I that I may avenge their doom.'

A silence as the silence of death fell upon the three, and all was still save that Eva trembled greatly. But ere long Bove Derg spake. Fierce and angry did he look, as, high above his foster-daughter, he held his magic wand. Awful was his voice as he pronounced her doom. 'Wretched woman, henceforth shalt thou no longer darken this fair earth, but as a demon of the air shalt thou dwell in misery till the end of time.' And of a sudden from out her shoulders grew black, shadowy wings, and, with a piercing scream, she swirled upward, until the awe-stricken Dedannans saw nought

save a black speck vanish among the lowering clouds. And as a demon of the air do Eva's black wings swirl her through space to this day.

But great and good was Bove Derg. He laid aside his magic wand and so spake: 'Let us, my people, leave the Great Lake, and let us pitch our tents on the shores of Lake Darvra. Exceeding dear unto us are the children of Lir, and I, Bove Derg, and Lir, their father, have vowed henceforth to make our home for ever by the lone waters where they dwell.'

And when it was told throughout the Green Island of Erin of the fate of the children of Lir and of the vow that Bove Derg had vowed, from north, south, east, and west did the Dedannans flock to the lake, until a mighty host dwelt by its shores.

And by day Finola and her brothers knew not loneliness, for in the sweet Gaelic speech they told of their joys and fears; and by night the mighty Dedannans knew no sorrowful memories, for by haunting songs were they lulled to sleep, and the music brought peace to their souls.

Slowly did the years go by, and upon the shoulders of Bove Derg and Lir fell the long white hair. Fearful grew the four swans, for the time was not far off, when they must wing their flight north to the wild sea of Moyle.

And when at length the sad day dawned, Finola told her brothers how their three hundred happy years on Lake Darvra were at an end, and how they must now leave the peace of its lone waters for evermore.

Then, slowly and sadly, did the four swans glide to the margin of the lake. Never had the snowy whiteness of their plumage so dazzled the beholders, never had music so sweet and sorrowful floated to Lake Darvra's sunlit shores. As the swans reached the water's edge, silent were the three brothers, and alone Finola chanted a farewell song.

With bowed white heads did the Dedannan host listen to Finola's chant, and when the music ceased and only sobs broke the stillness, the four swans spread their wings, and, soaring high, paused but for one short moment to gaze on the kneeling forms of Lir and Bove Derg. Then, stretching their graceful necks toward

the north, they winged their flight to the waters of the stormy sea that separates the blue Alba from the Green Island of Erin.

And when it was known throughout the Green Isle that the four white swans had flown, so great was the sorrow of the people that they made a law that no swan should be killed in Erin from that day forth.

With hearts that burned with longing for their father and their friends, did Finola and her brothers reach the sea of Moyle. Cold and chill were its wintry waters, black and fearful were the steep rocks overhanging Alba's far-stretching coasts. From hunger, too, the swans suffered. Dark indeed was all, and darker yet as the children of Lir remembered the still waters of Lake Darvra and the fond Dedannan host on its peaceful shores. Here the sighing of the wind among the reeds no longer soothed their sorrow, but the roar of the breaking surf struck fresh terror in their souls.

In misery and terror did their days pass, until one night the black, lowering clouds overhead told that a great tempest was nigh. Then

did Finola call to her Aed, Fiacra, and Conn. 'Beloved brothers, a great fear is at my heart, for, in the fury of the coming gale, we may be driven the one from the other. Therefore, let us say where we may hope to meet when the storm is spent.'

And Aed answered, 'Wise art thou, dear, gentle sister. If we be driven apart, may it be to meet again on the rocky isle that has oft-times been our haven, for well known is it to us all, and from far can it be seen.'

Darker grew the night, louder raged the wind, as the four swans dived and rose again on the giant billows. Yet fiercer blew the gale, until at midnight loud bursts of thunder mingled with the roaring wind, but, in the glare of the blue lightning's flashes, the children of Lir beheld each the snowy form of the other. The mad fury of the hurricane yet increased, and the force of it lifted one swan from its wild home on the billows, and swept it through the blackness of the night. Another blue lightning flash, and each swan saw its loneliness, and uttered a great cry of desolation. Tossed hither and thither, by wind and wave, the white

birds were well-nigh dead when dawn broke. And with the dawn fell calm.

Swift as her tired wings would bear her, Finola sailed to the rocky isle, where she hoped to find her brothers. But alas! no sign was there of one of them. Then to the highest summit of the rocks she flew. North, south, east, and west did she look, yet nought saw she save a watery wilderness. Now did her heart fail her, and she sang the saddest song she had yet sung.

As the last notes died Finola raised her eyes, and lo! Conn came slowly swimming towards her with drenched plumage and head that drooped. And as she looked, behold! Fiacra appeared, but it was as though his strength failed. Then did Finola swim toward her fainting brother and lend him her aid, and soon the twins were safe on the sunlit rock, nestling for warmth beneath their sister's wings.

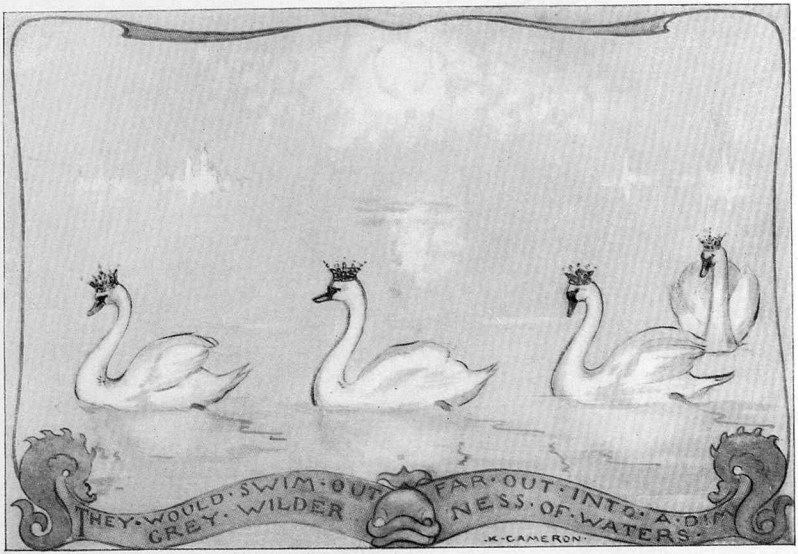
Yet Finola's heart still beat with alarm as she sheltered her younger brothers, for Aed came not, and she feared lest he were lost for ever. But, at noon, sailing he came over the breast of the blue waters, with head erect and

plumage sunlit. And under the feathers of her breast did Finola draw him, for Conn and Fiacra still cradled beneath her wings. 'Rest here, while ye may, dear brothers,' she said.

And she sang to them a lullaby so surpassing sweet that the sea-birds hushed their cries and flocked to listen to the sad, slow music. And when Aed and Fiacra and Conn were lulled to sleep, Finola's notes grew more and more faint and her head drooped, and soon she too slept peacefully in the warm sunlight.

But few were the sunny days on the sea of Moyle, and many were the tempests that ruffled its waters. Still keener grew the winter frosts, and the misery of the four white swans was greater than ever before. Even their most sorrowful Gaelic songs told not half their woe. From the fury of the storm they still sought shelter on that rocky isle where Finola had despaired of seeing her dear ones more.

Slowly passed the years of doom, until one mid-winter a frost more keen than any known before froze the sea into a floor of solid black ice. By night the swans crouched together on the rocky isle for warmth, but each morning


THEY·WOULD·SWIM·OUT·FAR·OUT·INTO·A·DIM
GREY·WILDERNESS·OF·WATERS·
K·CAMERON·

they were frozen to the ground and could free themselves only with sore pain, for they left clinging to the ice-bound rock the soft down of their breasts, the quills from their white wings, and the skin of their poor feet.

And when the sun melted the ice-bound surface of the waters, and the swans swam once more in the sea of Moyle, the salt water entered their wounds, and they well-nigh died of pain. But in time the down on their breasts and the feathers on their wings grew, and they were healed of their wounds.

The years dragged on, and by day Finola and her brothers would fly toward the shores of the Green Island of Erin, or to the rocky blue headlands of Alba, or they would swim far out into a dim grey wilderness of waters. But ever as night fell it was their doom to return to the sea of Moyle.

One day, as they looked toward the Green Isle, they saw coming to the coast a troop of horsemen mounted on snow-white steeds, and their armour glittered in the sun.

A cry of great joy went up from the children of Lir, for they had seen no human form since

they spread their wings above Lake Darvra, and flew to the stormy sea of Moyle.

'Speak,' said Finola to her brothers, 'speak, and say if these be not our own Dedannan folk.' And Aed and Fiacra and Conn strained their eyes, and Aed answered, 'It seemeth, dear sister, to me, that it is indeed our own people.'

As the horsemen drew nearer and saw the four swans, each man shouted in the Gaelic tongue, 'Behold the children of Lir!'

And when Finola and her brothers heard once more the sweet Gaelic speech, and saw the faces of their own people, their happiness was greater than can be told. For long they were silent, but at length Finola spake.

Of their life on the sea of Moyle she told, of the dreary rains and blustering winds, of the giant waves and the roaring thunder, of the black frost, and of their own poor battered and wounded bodies. Of their loneliness of soul, of that she could not speak. 'But tell us,' she went on, 'tell us of our father, Lir. Lives he still, and Bove Derg, and our dear Dedannan friends?'

Scarce could the Dedannans speak for the sorrow they had for Finola and her brothers, but they told how Lir and Bove Derg were alive and well, and were even now celebrating the Feast of Age at the house of Lir. 'But for their longing for you, your father and friends would be happy indeed.'

Glad then and of great comfort were the hearts of Finola and her brothers. But they could not hear more, for they must hasten to fly from the pleasant shores of Erin to the sea-stream of Moyle, which was their doom. And as they flew, Finola sang, and faint floated her voice over the kneeling host.

As the sad song grew fainter and more faint, the Dedannans wept aloud. Then, as the snow-white birds faded from sight, the sorrowful company turned the heads of their white steeds from the shore, and rode southward to the home of Lir.

And when it was told there of the sufferings of Finola and her brothers, great was the sorrow of the Dedannans. Yet was Lir glad that his children were alive, and he thought of the day when the magic spell would be broken,

and those so dear to him would be freed from their bitter woe.

Once more were ended three hundred years of doom, and glad were the four white swans to leave the cruel sea of Moyle. Yet might they fly only to the wild Western Sea, and tempest-tossed as before, here they in no way escaped the pitiless fury of wind and wave. Worse than aught they had before endured was a frost that drove the brothers to despair. Well-nigh frozen to a rock, they one night cried aloud to Finola that they longed for death. And she, too, would fain have died.

But that same night did a dream come to the swan-maiden, and, when she awoke, she cried to her brothers to take heart. 'Believe, dear brothers, in the great God who hath created the earth with its fruits and the sea with its terrible wonders. Trust in Him, and He will yet save you.' And her brothers answered, 'We will trust.'

And Finola also put her trust in God, and they all fell into a deep slumber.

When the children of Lir awoke, behold! the

sun shone, and thereafter, until the three hundred years on the Western Sea were ended, neither wind nor wave nor rain nor frost did hurt to the four swans.

On a grassy isle they lived and sang their wondrous songs by day, and by night they nestled together on their soft couch, and awoke in the morning to sunshine and to peace. And there on the grassy island was their home, until the three hundred years were at an end. Then Finola called to her brothers, and tremblingly she told, and tremblingly they heard, that they might now fly eastward to seek their own old home.

Lightly did they rise on outstretched wings, and swiftly did they fly until they reached land. There they alighted and gazed each at the other, but too great for speech was their joy. Then again did they spread their wings and fly above the green grass on and on, until they reached the hills and trees that surrounded their old home. But, alas! only the ruins of Lir's dwelling were left. Around was a wilderness overgrown with rank grass, nettles, and weeds.

Too downhearted to stir, the swans slept that night within the ruined walls of their old home, but, when day broke, each could no longer bear the loneliness, and again they flew westward. And it was not until they came to Inis Glora that they alighted. On a small lake in the heart of the island they made their home, and, by their enchanting music, they drew to its shores all the birds of the west, until the lake came to be called 'The Lake of the Bird-flocks.'

Slowly passed the years, but a great longing filled the hearts of the children of Lir. When would the good Saint come to Erin? When would the chime of the Christ-bell peal over land and sea?

One rosy dawn the swans awoke among the rushes of the Lake of the Bird-flocks, and strange and faint was the sound that floated to them from afar. Trembling, they nestled close the one to the other, until the brothers stretched their wings and fluttered hither and thither in great fear. Yet trembling they flew back to their sister, who had remained silent among the sedges. Crouching by her side they

asked, 'What, dear sister, can be the strange, faint sound that steals across our island?'

With quiet, deep joy Finola answered, 'Dear brothers, it is the chime of the Christ-bell that ye hear, the Christ-bell of which we have dreamed through thrice three hundred years. Soon the spell will be broken, soon our sufferings will end.' Then did Finola glide from the shelter of the sedges across the rose-lit lake, and there by the shore of the Western Sea she chanted a song of hope.

Calm crept into the hearts of the brothers as Finola sang, and, as she ended, once more the chime stole across the isle. No longer did it strike terror into the hearts of the children of Lir, rather as a note of peace did it sink into their souls.

Then, when the last chime died, Finola said, 'Let us sing to the great King of Heaven and Earth.'

Far stole the sweet strains of the white swans, far across Inis Glora, until they reached the good Saint Kemoc, for whose early prayers the Christ-bell had chimed.

And he, filled with wonder at the surpassing

sweetness of the music, stood mute, but when it was revealed unto him that the voices he heard were the voices of Finola and Aed and Fiacra and Conn, who thanked the High God for the chime of the Christ-bell, he knelt and also gave thanks, for it was to seek the children of Lir that the Saint had come to Inis Glora.

In the glory of noon, Kemoc reached the shore of the little lake, and saw four white swans gliding on its waters. And no need had the Saint to ask whether these indeed were the children of Lir. Rather did he give thanks to the High God who had brought him hither.

Then gravely the good Kemoc said to the swans, 'Come ye now to land, and put your trust in me, for it is in this place that ye shall be freed from your enchantment.'

These words the four white swans heard with great joy, and coming to the shore they placed themselves under the care of the Saint. And he led them to his cell, and there they dwelt with him. And Kemoc sent to Erin for a skilful workman, and ordered that two slender chains of shining silver be made.

IT·WAS· SAINT· KEMOC·

Betwixt Finola and Aed did he clasp one silver chain, and with the other did he bind Fiacra and Conn.

Then did the children of Lir dwell with the holy Kemoc, and he taught them the wonderful story of Christ that he and Saint Patrick had brought to the Green Isle. And the story so gladdened their hearts that the misery of their past sufferings was well-nigh forgotten, and they lived in great happiness with the Saint. Dear to him were they, dear as though they had been his own children.

Thrice three hundred years had gone since Eva had chanted the fate of the children of Lir. 'Until Decca be the Queen of Largnen, until the good Saint come to Erin, and ye hear the chime of the Christ-bell, shall ye not be delivered from your doom.'

The good Saint had indeed come, and the sweet chimes of the Christ-bell had been heard, and the fair Decca was now the Queen of King Largnen.

Soon were tidings brought to Decca of the swan-maiden and her three swan-brothers. Strange tales did she hear of their haunting

songs. It was told her, too, of their cruel miseries. Then begged she her husband, the King, that he would go to Kemoc and bring to her these human birds.

But Largnen did not wish to ask Kemoc to part with the swans, and therefore he did not go.

Then was Decca angry, and swore she would live no longer with Largnen, until he brought the singing swans to the palace. And that same night she set out for her father's kingdom in the south.

Nevertheless Largnen loved Decca, and great was his grief when he heard that she had fled. And he commanded messengers to go after her, saying he would send for the white swans if she would but come back. Therefore Decca returned to the palace, and Largnen sent to Kemoc to beg of him the four white swans. But the messenger returned without the birds.

Then was Largnen wroth, and set out himself for the cell of Kemoc. But he found the Saint in the little church, and before the altar were the four white swans.

'Is it truly told me that you refused these birds to Queen Decca?' asked the King.

'It is truly told,' replied Kemoc.

Then Largnen was more wroth than before, and seizing the silver chain of Finola and Aed in the one hand, and the chain of Fiacra and Conn in the other, he dragged the birds from the altar and down the aisle, and it seemed as though he would leave the church. And in great fear did the Saint follow.

But lo! as they reached the door, the snow-white feathers of the four swans fell to the ground, and the children of Lir were delivered from their doom. For was not Decca the bride of Largnen, and the good Saint had he not come, and the chime of the Christ-bell was it not heard in the land?

But aged and feeble were the children of Lir. Wrinkled were their once fair faces, and bent their little white bodies.

At the sight Largnen, affrighted, fled from the church, and the good Kemoc cried aloud, 'Woe to thee, O King!'

Then did the children of Lir turn toward the Saint, and thus Finola spake: 'Baptize us

now, we pray thee, for death is nigh. Heavy with sorrow are our hearts that we must part from thee, thou holy one, and that in loneliness must thy days on earth be spent. But such is the will of the High God. Here let our graves be digged, and here bury our four bodies, Conn standing at my right side, Fiacra at my left, and Aed before my face, for thus did I shelter my dear brothers for thrice three hundred years 'neath wing and breast.'

Then did the good Kemoc baptize the children of Lir, and thereafter the Saint looked up, and lo! he saw a vision of four lovely children with silvery wings, and faces radiant as the sun; and as he gazed they floated ever upward, until they were lost in a mist of blue. Then was the good Kemoc glad, for he knew that they had gone to Heaven.

But, when he looked downward, four worn bodies lay at the church door, and Kemoc wept sore.

And the Saint ordered a wide grave to be digged close by the little church, and there were the children of Lir buried, Conn standing at Finola's right hand, and Fiacra at her

left, and before her face her twin brother Aed.

And the grass grew green above them, and a white tombstone bore their names, and across the grave floated morning and evening the chime of the sweet Christ-bell.

DERMAT AND GRANIA

It was at Tara that King Cormac would hold a great meeting, and the chiefs and nobles of the land were gathered together there.

But ere the business of the day was begun, it was told that two warriors were without and would talk with the King.

Then did Cormac welcome the messengers, and when he heard that they came from the broad hill slopes of Allen and bore a message from Finn, their King, he said that the meeting should not be held that day, but that he would speak with the warriors alone.

And after they had eaten and drunk, Cormac bade them tell their errand.

Then spake Oisin, the son of Finn, and he told how his mother had long been dead, and how his father would fain marry Grania, the fair daughter of Cormac.

But Cormac made answer, 'Scarce in all Erin is there a prince that hath not sought in

marriage the hand of my daughter, but she hath refused them all. For this cause have I their ill-will, for the Princess hath ever made me tell how none had won her favour. Wherefore shall I bring you to my daughter's presence, that from her own lips ye may hear the answer that ye shall carry to your King.'

So Cormac went with Oisin the son of Finn and with Dering his friend to the sunny room of the Princess. And Cormac sat by Grania on the couch and told her wherefore the champions were come.

And Grania, giving little heed to the matter, made answer, 'If Finn be a fitting son-in-law for my father, the King, then may he well be a worthy husband for me.'

When Oisin the son of Finn and Dering his friend heard these words they were glad, for they knew not how little thought the Princess gave to her words.

And Cormac made a feast for the champions, and ere they departed he told them that after two weeks Finn should come thither.

So the warriors bade farewell to the palace of Cormac and went back to Allen, and there

they told Finn that after two weeks he should go to Tara and wed the fair Grania.

Slow sped the days, but when they were passed, Finn, with many chiefs and nobles as his guard, marched to Tara. And there Cormac received him right royally and made ready a great feast. On his right hand sat Finn and on his left the Queen. And next the Queen sat Grania.

Now it chanced that the chief who sat on the other side of Grania was a story-teller, and the Princess listened gladly to the tales he told.

But when he ceased from his tales Grania asked, 'Wherefore is it that Finn hath come hither to feast?'

And the chief, filled with wonder that the Princess should question him thus, made answer, 'Of a truth hath Finn come hither this day to claim thee for his wife.'

Then Grania bethought her of the words she had spoken to Oisin the son of Finn and to Dering his friend, and of how she spake without heed. And now was Finn come hither to seek her for his wife.

A long, deep silence fell upon the Princess, while her eyes roved among the goodly company.

At length she turned again to the chief who sat next her. 'Of this goodly company,' she said, 'I know none save Oisin the son of Finn and Dering his friend. Tell me, I pray thee, who sitteth yonder by Oisin's side?'

And the chief told his name and sang his praise.

Again Grania asked, 'And who, I pray thee, sitteth by his side?'

And the chief told his name and sang his praise.

Afterwards Grania sought of the chief the names of many of the nobles, and he told her, and he told too of the deeds they had done.

Then the Princess called her handmaid and said, 'Bring me from my room the jewelled drinking horn.' And the handmaiden brought it and Grania filled it to the brim and said, 'Take it to Finn, and say that I would have him drink from it.'

And Finn drank from the drinking horn, and then passed it to Cormac the King. And the King drank from it and also the Queen.

Then again Grania filled the drinking horn to the brim, and yet again, until all whom she wished to drink had drunk from it. And it was not long until a deep sleep had fallen upon all who had drunk.

Grania then rose slowly from her seat and crossed the hall to where Dermat sat, for Dermat, of those nobles that Finn brought with him, pleased her the best. And to him she spake thus:

'Dermat, it is from the champion who sat next me that I have learnt thy name, but ere I knew it I loved thee. From the sunny window of my chamber did I not watch thee on the day of the hurling-match? No part didst thou take in the contest till, seeing the game go against the men of Allen, thou didst rush into the crowd, and three times didst thou win the goal. My heart went out to thee that day, and now do I know that thee only do I love. Sore is my distress for the heedless words I spake which have brought Finn hither. Older is he than Cormac my father, and him will I not wed. Therefore, I pray thee, flee with me hence.'

Sore troubled was Dermat as he listened to these words, and at length he replied, 'Unworthy am I of thy love, and there is not a stronghold in Erin that would shelter us from the wrath of Finn were this thing to be.'

When Grania heard the words that Dermat spake, she said, 'I place thee under a solemn vow that thou follow me from Tara ere Finn shall wake. And thou knowest there is no true hero but will hold his vow binding even unto death.'

'Even though we so willed it,' replied Dermat, 'could we not escape from Tara, for Finn hath in his keeping the keys of the great gate.'

'Yet canst thou escape if thou wilt,' said Grania, 'for a champion such as thou canst bound over the highest wall in Erin. By the wicket-gate leading from my chamber shall I go forth, and if thou followest me not, alone shall I flee from the sight of Finn.' And having spoken thus, Grania went forth from the hall.

Then was Dermat in sore plight, for he would not depart from the solemn vow that Grania had laid upon him, and yet he feared lest the Princess should not escape the wrath of Finn.

And he took counsel of the nobles who had come hither with Finn, and there was not one but said, 'Even though death come of it, thou canst not depart from thy solemn vow.'

Then Dermat arose, and when he was armed he bade his companions a tearful farewell, for he knew they might see his face no more.

Forth he went, and with an exceeding light bound he cleared the rampart and alighted on the green grass beyond. And there Grania met him.

And Dermat said to the Princess, 'Even now, I pray of thee, return to thy father's home and Finn shall hear nought of this thing.'

But Grania's will was firm, and she said, 'I will not return now nor will I return hereafter, for death only shall part me and thee.'

'Then go forward, O Grania,' said Dermat, and the two went forth.

But when they were scarce a mile from Tara Grania told Dermat that she was weary.

And Dermat said, 'It is a good time to weary, O Grania. Get thee back to thine own household, for I plight thee the word of a true warrior

that I will not carry thee from thy father's house.'

'Neither is there need,' answered Grania, 'for my father's horses are in a fenced meadow by themselves, and chariots also will ye find there. Yoke two horses to a chariot, and I will wait for thee on this spot until thou overtake me again.'

Then Dermat did as Grania said, and he brought the horses and the chariot, and they drove forth.

But when they came to the banks of the river Shannon, Dermat said, 'Now that we have the horses it is easier for Finn to follow in our track.'

'Then,' said Grania, 'leave the horses on this spot and I will journey on foot henceforth.'

And Dermat, when he saw that the Princess would not be moved, told her how great was his love for her, and how he would defend her even with his life from the wrath of Finn.

And Dermat wed Grania, and they vowed solemn vows that they would be faithful each to each even unto death.

Then tenderly did Dermat lift his wife in his

strong arms and bear her across the ford, and neither the sole of her foot nor the hem of her mantle touched the stream.

Afterwards Dermat led one of the horses across the ford, but the other he left on the far side.

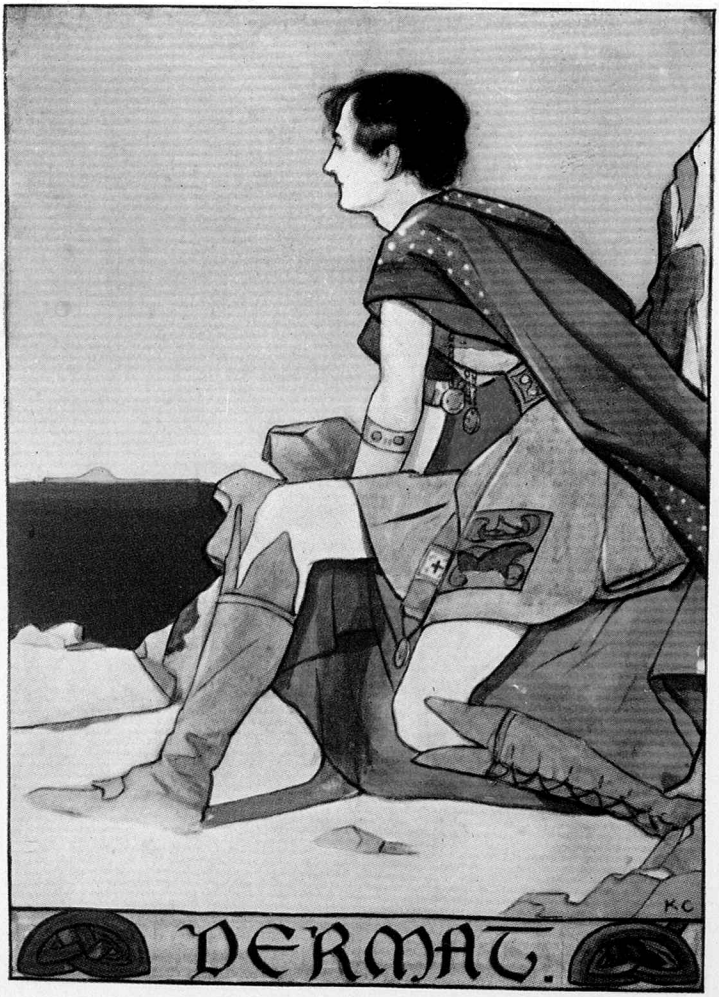
Dermat and Grania then walked until they came to a thick wood, and there Dermat lopped branches from the trees and made a hut, and he made for Grania a bed of the soft rushes and of the tops of the birch.

And there Grania rested, and there did Dermat bring to her food of the forest and water from a clear spring.

It was early dawn at Tara when Cormac and Finn awoke from their deep sleep.

When Finn found that Grania had fled with Dermat, great was his wrath, and he called to him his nobles, and ordered them with all speed to follow in the track of Dermat and Grania.

And Finn went with them, nor was the track hard to follow until they came to the


K.C.
DERMAT.

river Shannon, but there it was lost and no man could find it.

Then was the wrath of Finn so great that he said he would hang his nobles, and not one would he spare, if they did not again find the track, and that with all speed.

So, being sore afraid, they crossed the river, and when they had searched they saw the horses one on either side, and they found, too, the spot where Dermat and Grania had turned from the river.

And when they told Finn, he was content, for he knew of a surety that Dermat and Grania hid in the deep wood.

Now among the nobles were those who loved Dermat, and would fain save him from the hate of Finn. And one said, 'It behooveth us to send warning to Dermat. Let us send to him Bran, the hound of Finn, for Bran loveth Dermat as though he were his own master.'

And they called the hound and told him secretly what he should do.

Bran listened with ears erect, and then, losing no time, he followed the track, nor did he miss it once until it brought him unto the hut. And

going in he found Dermat and Grania asleep, and he thrust his head into Dermat's bosom.

And Dermat woke with a start, and when he saw Bran there was no need for the hound to tell whence he came.

Then Dermat awoke his wife and told her that Finn was near.

Great fear looked from out the eyes of Grania when she heard, and she begged that they might flee.

But Dermat answered, 'Were we to flee, yet would Finn overtake us, and it were as ill to fall into his hands then as at this time, but neither he nor his men shall enter this hut without my leave.'

Still Grania feared greatly, but she spake no further, for in Dermat's eyes she read his gloom.

While Bran still tarried by the hut, the nobles who loved Dermat thought of yet another warning to send their friend. They had with them a serving-man whose voice was so loud that it could be heard for many miles, and they made this man give three shouts that Dermat might hear.

And when Dermat heard the shouts he said to Grania, 'Well I know whose is the voice that shouteth, and full well I know that it cometh as a warning that Finn is nigh.'

Then great fear took hold of Grania, and she trembled, and again she said, 'Let us flee, for how shall we withstand the wrath of Finn?'

But Dermat said, 'We will not flee, but neither Finn nor his men shall enter the hut without my leave.'

Then was Grania filled with foreboding, yet spake she no further, for sad and stern was her husband's voice, and in his eyes she read his gloom.

Now Finn, having reached the wood, sent forward his men, but when they came to the thickest part of the forest they beheld a fence which no man could break through or climb. For Dermat had cleared a space round his hut and around the space had he built the strong fence.

Then the nobles climbed a high tree and from it did they look within the fence, and there they saw Dermat and with him a lady.

But for their love of Dermat did the nobles

hide from Finn that they had seen his foe. And one said to him, 'Far would it be from the mind of Dermat to await thee here, knowing as he does that his life is in peril.'

Then did Finn's wrath wax strong, and he replied, 'That Dermat hath thee for friend will avail him nought. Was it not to warn him that your serving-man gave three shouts, and was it not to warn him that ye sent unto him my dog Bran? Full well I know that Dermat is hid behind yonder strong fence.'

And Finn cried aloud, 'Which of us, Dermat, is it that speaketh truth? Art thou behind the fence?'

'Thou, as ever, art right, O King,' cried Dermat. 'I am here, and with me is Grania, but none other shall come hither save with my leave.'

Now in the circle fence were seven doors, and at each door did Finn place strong men, so that Dermat should by no means escape.

And Grania, when she heard Finn's voice, was filled with fear, and she trembled greatly. Then Dermat kissed her three times and bade her be of good cheer for all would yet be well.

Now it was by Angus of Bruga that Dermat had been brought up. Most skilled in magic was this Angus, and to him was the plight of Dermat revealed—Dermat, whom he loved as though he were his own son.

So Angus arose and travelled on the wings of the wind until he came to the hut where Dermat and Grania dwelt, and, unseen of Finn or his chiefs, he entered the dwelling.

And Dermat, when he saw his foster-father, greeted him gladly and told him of the solemn vow which the Princess Grania had laid upon him, and how she was his wedded wife. 'And now are we in sore strait, for Finn, whose will it was to marry Grania, hath pursued us and would fain take my life.'

'No harm shall befall you,' said Angus, 'if ye will but shelter under my mantle, the one on the right side and the other on the left, for then will I bring you both forth from this place, and Finn shall know it not.'

But Dermat would not flee from Finn, yet it was his will that Grania should go with Angus. 'And I will follow if it be that I leave this place

alive, yet should I be slain, I pray thee, Angus, send the Princess to her father and beg him that he deal gently with her.'

Then Dermat kissed Grania, and Angus, having told the way that they would go, placed the Princess beneath his mantle and was carried forth on the wings of the wind unseen of Finn.

When Angus and Grania had gone, Dermat girded on his armour, and, deep in thought, he walked to one of the seven doors and asked who was without.

And the answer came, 'True friends are we, and no harm shall befall thee, shouldst thou venture forth.'

But Dermat answered, 'I seek the door guarded by Finn, and by none other shall I leave this place.'

And he came to another door and asked who was without, and again was it told him, 'Thy bounden friends.'

Then to the third, to the fourth, and to the fifth door did Dermat go, and at each was he told how the men without were willing to fight to the death for their love of him.

But when Dermat came to the sixth door and asked by whom it was guarded, the answer came, 'No friends of thine, for shouldst thou dare to venture forth, we will make thee a mark for our swords and spears.'

'Cowards, no fear of you keepeth me from coming forth, but I crave not the blood of such as ye.'

And he went to the seventh door and asked who was without. And the voice of Finn answered, 'He that hateth thee, and will sever thy head from thy body shouldst thou dare to come forth.'

'At length have I found the door I seek, for by the door that Finn guardeth, by it only shall I pass out.'

But Dermat, seeing of a sudden an unguarded spot, sprang with a light bound over the fence, and ran so swiftly that soon he was beyond the reach of sword or spear. And no man dared to follow Dermat. Nor did the hero rest until he came to the warm, well-lighted hut where Grania sat with Angus before a blazing fire.

When Grania saw Dermat her heart leaped

for joy. Then did he tell her his tidings from beginning to end, and after they had eaten they slept in peace until the morning brake.

And while it was yet early Angus bid them farewell, and he left with them this warning, knowing that Finn would pursue them still: 'Go into no tree that has but one trunk; nor into any cave having but one opening; land on no island that has but one way leading to it; where you cook your food, there eat it not; where you eat, sleep not there; and where you sleep to-night, rise not there to-morrow.'[1]

And when Angus had left them, Dermat and Grania sorrowed after him, and it was not long until they journeyed forth.

All that befell Dermat and Grania cannot be told in this book, but of Sharvan the giant and of the fairy quicken-tree you shall hear now.

After many wanderings Dermat came with Grania to the wood where Sharvan guarded

[1] Angus meant that Dermat should change his place of sleeping during the night.

the quicken-tree. Honey-sweet were the berries of the tree, and gladness flowed through the veins of him who ate thereof. Though he were one hundred years old, yet would he be but thirty so soon as he had eaten three of the fairy berries.

By day Sharvan the giant sat at the foot of the tree, and by night he sat in a hut in its branches, and no man dared to come near. Fearful to behold and wicked was this Sharvan. One eye, one red eye gleamed from the middle of his black forehead. On his body was a girdle of iron, and from the girdle was a heavy club hung by a heavy chain. And by magic was Sharvan saved from death, for water would not drown him nor fire burn; neither was there weapon, save one, that could wound the giant. The one weapon was Sharvan's own club, for were he by it dealt three blows, his doom was come.

Now Dermat knew of the giant that guarded the fairy quicken-tree, therefore he left Grania in shelter and went alone to the foot of the tree. And there sat Sharvan, for it was day.

And Dermat told the giant how he would fain build a hut in the forest and hunt amid the woods.

Then the giant, casting his red eye upon the champion, told him in surly tone that it mattered not to him who lived or hunted in the forest, so long as he did not eat the berries of the quicken-tree.

So Dermat built a hut near to a clear well, and there he and Grania lived in peace for many days, eating the food of the forest and drinking water from the spring.

Now it was at this time that two chiefs came to Finn on the green slopes of Allen. And when he asked them who they were and whence they came, they told how they were enemies that would fain make peace.

But Finn answered, 'One of two things must ye bring hither would ye win peace from me. Either must ye bring me the head of a warrior or a handful of berries from the quicken-tree.'

Then said Oisin the son of Finn, 'I counsel you, get ye hence, for the head that the King seeketh from you is the head of Dermat, and

were ye to attempt to take it, then would Dermat take yours, were ye twenty times the number that ye be. And as for the quicken-berries, know ye that they grow on a fairy tree, guarded by the one-eyed giant Sharvan.'

But the two chiefs were firm and would not be moved, for it were better to die in their quest than to return to the hilly slopes of Allen at enmity with Finn. So they left the palace, and journeyed without rest until they came to Dermat's hut by the clear well.

Now Dermat, when he heard footsteps without, seized his weapons, and going to the door, asked of the strangers who they were and whence they came.

And the chiefs told their names and for what cause they were come thither.

Then Dermat said, 'I am not willing to give you my head, nor will you find it an easy matter to take it. Neither may ye hope to fare better in your quest of the quicken-berries, for the surly giant Sharvan guards the tree. Fire will not burn him nor water drown, nor is there a weapon that hath power to wound him, save only his own club. Say, therefore,

which ye will do battle for first, my head or the quicken-berries?'

And they answered, 'We will first do battle with thee.'

So they made ready, and it was agreed that they should use nought save their hands in the combat. And if Dermat were overcome then should his head be taken by the chiefs to Finn; if they were overpowered then should their heads be forfeit to Dermat.

But the fight was short, for the chiefs were as children in the hands of the hero, and he bound them sore in bitter bonds.

Now when Grania heard of the quicken-berries she longed with a great longing to taste them. At first she said nought for she knew how they were guarded by the surly giant Sharvan; but when she could hide her desire no longer, she said to Dermat, 'So great is my longing for the berries of the quicken-tree that if I may not eat of them I shall surely die.'

And Dermat, who would see no ill befall his dear wife, said he would bring her the berries.

When the two chiefs heard this, they prayed

Dermat to loose their bonds that they also might fight the giant.

But Dermat answered, 'At the mere sight of Sharvan ye would flee, and even were it not so I wish the aid of none.'

Then the chiefs begged that they might see the fight, and Dermat gave them leave.

When the champion came to the foot of the quicken-tree he found Sharvan there, asleep. And he struck the giant a mighty blow to awake him.

Then Sharvan raised his head, and, glaring at Dermat with his one red eye, said, 'There hath been peace betwixt us heretofore, wherefore should we now depart from it?'

And Dermat said, 'It is not to strive that I come hither, but to beg of thee berries from the quicken-tree, for Grania, my wife, longeth for them with a great longing.'

But the giant answered, 'Though the Princess were at the point of death, yet would I not give her berries from the quicken-tree.'

When Dermat heard this he said, 'It had pleased me well to remain at peace with thee,

but now must I take the berries from the tree whether it be thy will or no.'

At these words Sharvan waxed exceeding wroth, and with his club did he deal Dermat three sore blows. But the champion, recovering, sprang upon the giant, and seizing his great club, he ceased not to belabour him until he fell to earth a dead man.

Then Dermat sat down to rest. And he told the captive chiefs to drag the body of the giant into the wood and bury it, that Grania might not be affrighted. And when they had come back he sent for the Princess.

And Grania, when she came to the quicken-tree, would not gather the fruit, for she said, 'I will eat no berries save those plucked by the hand of my husband.'

So Dermat plucked the berries, and Grania ate and was satisfied.

Then the champion gave berries of the quicken-tree to the captive chiefs, saying, 'Take these to Finn and so win your peace.' And this he said as though they were free men.

They thanked the hero for his words, and also for the berries, which they could not have

got of themselves. Then having bid Dermat and Grania farewell they journeyed forth towards the hilly slopes of Allen.

When they were gone, Dermat and Grania went to the top of the quicken-tree, into the hut of Sharvan, and the berries below were but bitter compared to the berries that were above upon the tree.

Now when Finn's two enemies were come to Allen he asked them how they had fared, and whether they had brought with them the head of Dermat or a handful of berries from the quicken-tree.

And they answered, 'Sharvan the giant is slain, and behold here we have brought thee berries from the quicken-tree so that henceforth we may live at peace.'

Then Finn took the berries in his hand, and when he had smelled them three times he said, 'Of a truth these be the berries of the quicken-tree, but not of your own strength have ye gotten them. Full well I know that by Dermat hath Sharvan the giant been slain, and from his hand have ye gotten the berries. Therefore have ye no peace from me, and now shall I

summon an army that I may march to the wood of the quicken-tree, for there surely doth Dermat dwell.'

Now when Finn came with his army to the quicken-tree it was noon, and the sun shone with great heat.

Therefore Finn said to his men, 'Under this tree shall we rest until the sun be set, for well I know that Dermat is among the branches. Bring hither a chess-board that I may play.'

And Finn sat down to play against Oisin his son, but there were with Oisin three nobles to help him, while Finn played without aid.

With care and with skill did they play, until at length Finn said to his son, 'I see one move, Oisin, that would win thee the game, yet is there none of thine helpers that can show thee how thou mayest win.'

Then Dermat, who had watched the game from among the branches overhead, spoke aloud to himself the move that should be played.

And Grania sat by her husband ill at ease. 'It matters not, Dermat,' she said, 'whether Oisin win or lose the game, but if thou speakest so that they hear, it may cost thee thy life.'

Yet did Dermat pay no heed to the counsel of Grania, but plucked a berry, and with it took aim so true that he hit the chessman that Oisin should move.

And Oisin moved the man and won the game.

Yet again did Finn play against Oisin and his friends, and once more had Oisin to make but one move to win the game.

Then did Dermat throw down a berry as before and it struck the right man.

And Oisin moved the piece and won the game.

A third time did Oisin, son of Finn, play against his father, and it fell as before, for once more he won with Dermat's aid. And this time the nobles raised a mighty cheer.

But Finn said, 'No marvel is it, Oisin, that thou hast won the game, for of a surety thou hast had the aid of Dermat who dwelleth amid the branches of the quicken-tree.' And looking up he said, 'Have I not, Dermat, spoken truth?'

'I have never known thy judgment err, O King,' replied Dermat. 'In truth I dwell here with Grania in the hut that was built by Sharvan the giant.'

And they looked up, and through an opening in the branches they beheld Dermat kiss Grania three times, for the Princess was in great fear.

Then was Finn exceeding wroth, and he bade his men surround the tree, each holding the hand of each so that Dermat might by no means escape. And he offered great reward to any man that would go up into the tree and bring to him the hero's head or force him to come down.

One of Finn's men then spake: 'It was Dermat's father that slew my father, therefore will I go up into the tree.' And he went up.

Now it was revealed to Angus of Bruga that Dermat was in sore plight, and on the wings of the wind he came to his aid, unseen of Finn or his chiefs. So when the avenger climbed into the tree, Angus was there. And when Dermat with a stroke of his foot flung his enemy to the ground, Angus caused him to take the shape of Dermat, and for this reason Finn's men fell upon him and slew him.

But no sooner was he slain than he again took his own shape, and Finn knew that

Dermat was still alive in the quicken-tree. Then nine times did a man of Finn's army climb the tree, and nine times was he thrown to earth and killed by his own friends. For each time did Angus cause the warrior to take Dermat's shape.

When Finn saw nine of his men lie dead before him his heart failed him, and his soul was filled with bitterness.

At this time Angus said that he would take Grania away with him. And Dermat was content and said, 'If it be that I live until evening I will follow thee, but if Finn killeth me, I pray thee send the Princess to her father at Tara.'

So Angus flung his magic mantle around Grania, and on the wings of the wind they were carried to Bruga, unknown to Finn or his men.

Then Dermat spake from the tree: 'Thou surely shalt not escape my vengeance, O Finn, nor shalt thou easily compass my death. Oft have I cleared the way for thee when thou didst go forth to battle, and oft have I sheltered thy retreat when thou didst quit the field. Yet art thou unmindful of mine help, and I swear that I will be avenged.'

When the hero ceased from speaking, one of Finn's nobles said, 'Dermat speaketh truth, now therefore grant him thy forgiveness.'

But Finn answered, 'I will not to the end of my life grant him forgiveness, nor shall he know rest or peace until he yieldeth to me his head.'

Again the noble spake: 'Now pledge I thee the word of a true warrior that, unless the skies fall upon me or the earth open and swallow me up, no harm shall come nigh Dermat, for under my care I take his body and his life.' And looking up, the noble cried, 'O Dermat, I pledge thee my body and my life that no ill shall befall thee this day, therefore come down out of the tree.'

Then Dermat rose and stood upon a high bough. With an airy, bird-like bound he sprang forward and alighted outside the circle formed by the men who had joined hands, and was soon far beyond the reach of Finn.

And the noble who saved him followed, and they came together to Bruga, and there Angus and Grania met them, and the joy of the Princess cannot be told.

Yet was it not long ere Dermat was again in sore strait, for Finn followed him to Bruga, and with Finn came his old nurse. And she was a witch.

Now it chanced on the day that they came thither that Dermat hunted alone in the wood. And the witch flew on the leaf of a yellow water-lily till she came straight over the place where Dermat was. Then through a hole in the leaf she aimed deadly darts at the hero, and though he was clad in strong armour they did him great hurt.

So sore were his wounds that Dermat thought the witch would cause his death on the spot, unless he could pierce her through the hole in the leaf.

Therefore he took his red javelin and cast it with all care. And so sure was his aim that it reached the witch through the leaf, and she fell to the ground dead. Then Dermat cut off her head and took it to Angus.

Early on the morrow Angus rose and went where Finn was, and he asked him if he would make peace with Dermat.

And Finn, because he had now lost his

witch-nurse as well as many men, was glad to make peace in whatever way Dermat might choose.

Then Angus went to Cormac, and he too was glad to make peace with the hero.

But when Angus came to Dermat he said he would not make peace unless he received from Finn and from Cormac all the wide lands that he asked.

And Cormac and Finn gave him the lands, and forgave him all he had done.

Then was there at last peace between them, and Dermat and Grania built a house in Sligo, far from Cormac and Finn, and they called the name of their house Rath-Grania. And there were born unto them one daughter and four sons.

And it was said that there was not living in Erin a man richer than Dermat in gold and silver, in sheep and cattle herds.

Now it fell on a day after many years that Grania sat as one in a dream. And Dermat asked his wife in what troublous thought she

was lost, for he saw well that she was ill at ease.

And Grania answered, 'It seemeth not well to me that, having so great wealth, we live removed from the world, and welcome to our home neither my father nor Finn, though with both are we now at peace.'

Dermat gave heed to the words of his wife and then spake thus: 'Of a truth there is peace betwixt us, but thou knowest well that neither thy father the King nor yet Finn bears me aught but ill-will, and for this cause have we dwelt apart.'

'Yet will time have softened their hearts,' replied Grania, 'and wouldst thou but make them a feast, so mightest thou win their favour and their love.'

And Dermat, because of the love he bore Grania, granted her wish, and for a year they were making ready for the great feast.

Then were messengers sent to bid thither Cormac and Finn. And they came, and with them their nobles, their horses and their dogs, and for a full year they hunted and feasted at Rath-Grania.

When a year had passed, it chanced one night that the distant yelping of a hound woke Dermat from his sleep, and Grania too awoke and in great fear said, 'Of a truth doth that sound forebode ill. Heed it not, but lie down on thy bed and rest.'

Dermat lay down, but ere long he again heard the hound's voice. Then he started up, and made as though he would go to find for himself wherefore the hound disturbed the silence of the night. But again Grania begged him to lie down and to give no heed to the matter.

So Dermat lay down and fell into a light sleep, and when the hound awakened him the third time it was broad day. And Grania, seeing that his mind was set, did not beg him longer to stay, yet, fearing danger, she begged him to take with him his red javelin and his sword named 'The Greater Fury.'

But Dermat, deeming the matter light, took with him his yellow javelin and his sword 'The Lesser Fury,' and leading his faithful hound by the chain, went forth. And he did not rest till he came to the summit of a hill where he found Finn, and of him he asked the meaning of the chase.

And Finn answered that the men and hounds were tracking a wild boar which had ofttimes been chased, but had always escaped. Even now was it coming towards them, so it were well that they should betake themselves to some safer spot.

Dermat knew no fear of the wild boar, and he would not leave the summit of the hill where he stood. Yet did he pray Finn to leave with him his hound Bran, that it might help his own dog were he in need.

But Finn would not leave Bran to be torn by the wild boar that could now be seen coming towards them.

So Dermat stood alone on the summit of the hill, and he knew well it was that he might meet his death that Finn's men did hunt the boar this day. Yet would he not leave the hill, for if it were his fate to meet death, nought could save him from his doom.

Then as the boar came rushing up the face of the hill, Dermat let loose his good hound, but it, seeing the fearful monster, fled before him.

And now Dermat knew that he would have need of his red javelin, and he sorrowed that he

had given no heed to the counsel of Grania. Yet seizing his yellow javelin he cast it with careful aim and it struck the boar in its forehead. But it fell harmless to the ground, doing the monster no hurt.

Then Dermat drew his sword from its sheath, and with a mighty blow did he strike at the boar's neck. But the sword broke in his hand, and the boar felt not so much as a prick.

Now was Dermat without any weapon save the hilt of his sword, and the boar made a deadly onslaught, thrusting his tusk into the hero's side. But with the strength that was left him Dermat flung the hilt of the sword at the brute's head, and it pierced his skull and entered his brain, whereupon the boar fell dead.

But so deep was the wound in Dermat's side that when Finn came to him he found the hero near unto death.

And Finn said, 'Now am I well content, for thine end hath come.'

'Sure the words that thou speakest come not from thine heart,' answered Dermat, 'for it is in thy power to heal me, and that thou knowest full well.'

'How might I heal thee?' asked Finn.

'Thou knowest that power was given thee to heal him who might be at the point of death. Let him but drink water from the palms of thy closed hands, and he is healed of his hurt.'

'Yet wherefore should I heal thee who hast worked me nought but ill?'

'Thou wouldst not speak thus wert thou mindful of the day when I saved thee from the flames. Thou wast bidden to a banquet, and ere the feast began the palace was set a-fire by those who wished thee ill. And I and my men rushed forth and quenched the flames and slew thy foes. Had I begged water from thy hands that night thou hadst not said me nay.'

'Thou forgettest that but for thee the fair Grania were my wedded wife.'

'Of a surety am I not blameworthy in this matter, O Finn, for Grania laid upon me a solemn vow that I should follow her from Tara ere thou shouldst wake from thy sleep. And I took counsel of many nobles, and there was not one but said, "Even though death come of it, thou canst not depart from the solemn vow

that Grania hath laid upon thee." And now, I pray of thee, let me drink from thine hands, else surely death will overtake me in this place. From many another deadly strait have I delivered thee, yet hast thou forgotten them all. But the hour will come when surely thou wilt need my help shouldst thou let me die this day. Yet grieve I not to think that thou wilt be in deadly strait, but rather grieve I for those true heroes whom I shall no longer aid.'

Then one of the nobles, hearing these words, prayed Finn that he would let Dermat drink from his hands.

Finn replied, 'I know not of any well on this hill whence I can bring water.'

But Dermat said, 'Right well thou knowest that hidden by yonder bush is a well of crystal water. No more than nine paces must thou go to reach it. Let me, I pray thee, drink from thine hands.'

Then Finn went to the well, and in his two hands tightly together did he bring the water towards Dermat. But as he came nearer he spilled it through his fingers, saying that he could not in such manner carry water so far.

But Dermat believed him not, and said, 'Of thine own will hast thou spilled the water. I pray thee go once more to the well and bring me to drink, or I die.'

Again the King went to the well, and with failing sight did Dermat follow the dripping hands that came nearer and yet more near. But of a sudden Finn thought of Grania, and a second time was the water spilled. And when Dermat saw it, he uttered a piteous cry.

Then were the champions no longer able to see Dermat in such grievous plight, and one said to Finn, 'I swear to thee that if thou bringest not water to Dermat, thou shalt not leave this hill alive, save I be a dead man.'

Finn, hearing these words and seeing their frowns, went a third time to fetch water from the well. And this time he made haste to bring it to Dermat, but ere he had got half-way, the hero's head fell backward and he died.

Then were raised three long cries of sorrow for Dermat, who had been dear unto them all.

After some time had passed Finn said, 'Let

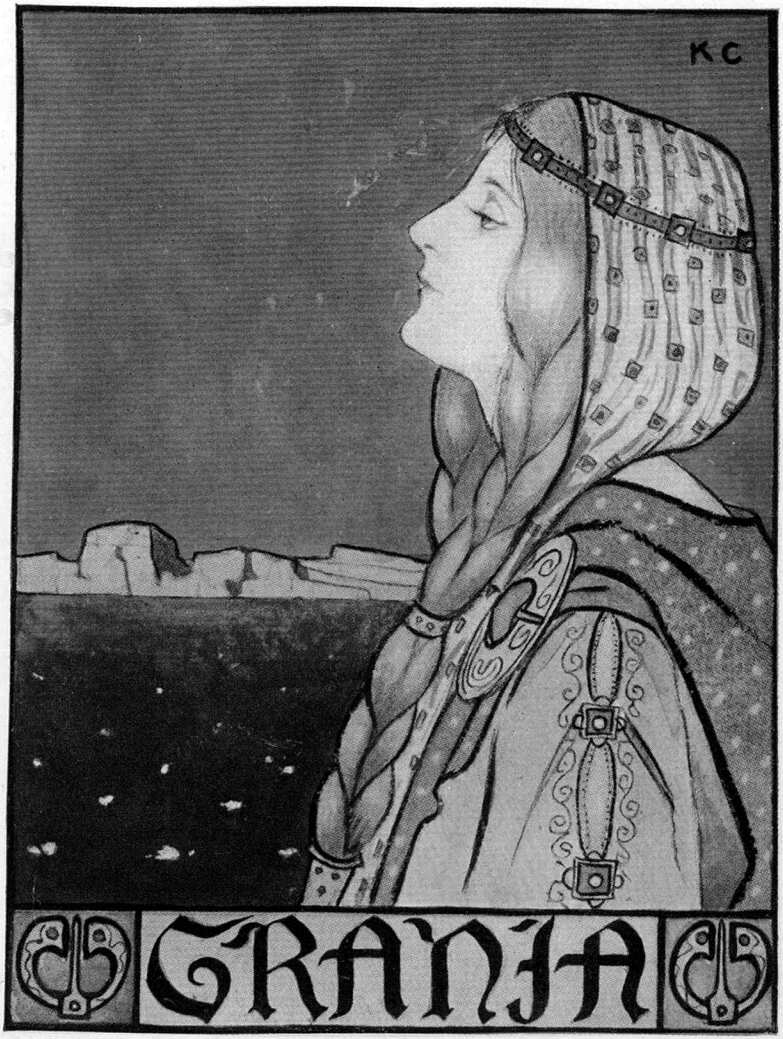
us leave this hill lest Angus come, for he may not believe that it was not at our hands that Dermat met his death.'

So Finn and his nobles left the hill, Finn leading Dermat's hound. But four of the nobles turned back and laid their mantles over the champion. Then they once more followed the King.

Grania sat that day on the highest tower of Rath-Grania, watching for Dermat. The fear she had felt in the night would not be stilled, and when at length Finn came in sight, leading by the chain Dermat's hound, she knew that she would not henceforth see Dermat alive. And when the truth had taken hold upon her, she fell in a swoon from the tower, and her handmaiden stood over her in great fear.

But at length her eyes opened, and when it was told her that Dermat was dead she uttered a long, piercing cry, so that all flocked to hear what had befallen the Princess. And when it was told that Dermat had been killed by the wild boar, the air was rent with cries of lamentation.

At length, when silence had fallen upon her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GRANIA

grief, Grania arose, and ordered that five hundred men should go to the hill and bring to her the body of Dermat. Then turning to Finn she begged of him to leave with her Dermat's hound. And Finn would not. But a noble, hearing that Grania wished the hound took him from the hand of Finn and gave him to the Princess.

Now as the men left Rath-Grania to bring home the body of Dermat, it was revealed to Angus of Bruga that the hero lay dead on the hill. And he at once set out on the wings of the wind and reached the sorrowful place ere Grania's messengers had come there. And they, when they came, found Angus mourning over the body of Dermat, and he asked them wherefore they were come.

When it was told Angus that Grania had sent them to bring the body of Dermat to Rath-Grania, he stayed for some time wrapt in thought. At length he spake these words: 'Let it be told the Princess that I will take with me the body of Dermat to my home, that he may be preserved by my power as though he still lived. For though I cannot bring him

back to life, yet each day shall he speak with me for some space.'

And Angus turned to his men that he had brought with him there and ordered that Dermat's body should be placed on a golden bier, with the red and yellow javelins, one on either side, points upward. Thus was the dead hero carried to the home of Angus.

When Grania's messengers came back to her bringing not with them the body of Dermat, she was at first sore grieved. But when she heard how the hero lay on a golden bier in the keeping of his foster-father, and would each day speak with Angus for some space, then was she content, for she knew that Angus loved Dermat as a father loveth his only son.

And Grania sent messengers to her sons to bid them come to her. And when they were come, she welcomed them gently and kissed them. Then with an exceeding loud and clear voice she said, 'O dear children, your father hath been slain by the will of Finn, though peace had been sworn between them. Therefore get ye hence and avenge his death. And that ye may have success in the battle, I will

myself portion out among you your inheritance of arms, of arrows, and of sharp weapons. Spare none that would do good to Finn, yet see ye to it that ye deal not treacherously with any man. Hasten ye and depart.'

Then the sons of Dermat bade their mother a tender farewell, and went forth to avenge their father's death.

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