

Oisín in Tír na nÓg: Senior

One misty, summer morning near Loch Léin, Oisín was out hunting with his father Fionn Mac Cumhail and his friends in the Fianna. Oisín was a great warrior and loved to hunt, but he was also a poet and a sweet singer. He used to sit on the hills overlooking Loch Léin, day-dreaming of mystical creatures and singing of faraway lands. On this day, something caught his attention.

A figure on a great white horse appeared on the horizon. As it grew closer, Oisín saw that the rider was a beautiful young woman. She was dressed like a queen and her soft golden hair glowed in the sun like a crown. Oisín thought that she had the deepest emerald-coloured eyes he had ever seen. It was love at first sight. She smiled at Oisín and said to him:

“My name is Niamh Cinn Óir and I am the princess of Tír na n-Óg, the Land of the Young. I have ridden all the way from my home because I have fallen in love with you Oisín. Come back with me to Tír na n-Óg and we will be the happiest couple alive.”

Oisín thought that he must be dreaming, but Niamh held out her hand to him:

“Climb up on my horse and we will ride to Tír na n-Óg together.”

Oisín mounted the great white horse and held Niamh safely in his arms. They galloped away leaving Fionn and the Fianna with their mouths wide open in wonder.

Oisín and Niamh held on as the horse guided them back to Tír na n-Óg. He galloped across the waves of the ocean, hardly touching the water at all. Soon the deep green valleys and mountains of Ireland disappeared behind them, and they were surrounded by a thick ocean mist. Suddenly, Oisín found himself in Niamh's homeland.

Oisín settled well in Tír na n-Óg. The people were always happy and friendly towards him. Niamh was very kind to him as well but as time went by, he began to miss Ireland. He became very homesick and longed to see his family and friends again. Niamh saw the sadness in his eyes and asked him what was wrong.

“I miss my friends and family in Ireland. Why don't we both visit them and I can introduce you to everyone?”

But Niamh could not leave Tír na n-Óg and she begged Oisín not to go either. In her heart, she knew that he had already made up his mind and said to him.

“Take my horse with you to Ireland and he will keep you safe. But you must promise me one thing - you must not touch Irish land.”

Oisín promised her he would stay on the horse. He kissed Niamh goodbye and promised he would come home to her soon. She wept as she watched her horse carry Oisín across the hills and over the ocean back to Ireland.

At first Oisín didn't recognise the land at all. Where were the great feasting halls? Why were the people so much smaller and weaker than he remembered? He went to the place where his father's great hall had been. All he found was a rocky mound overgrown with weeds and wild brambles. He called out for Brann and Sceolaing, his father's hounds, but they were not there.

He saw some men struggling to move a big rock from a tilled field and nudged the horse towards them.

“My name is Oisín, son of Fionn MacCumhail. Where can I find him and his warriors, the Fianna?” he asked.

The men stared at him. He was the biggest man they had ever seen. One of the older men answered Oisín:

“I have heard of Fionn MacCumhail and the Fianna. They were giant warriors that lived on this land 300 years ago.”

Oisín couldn't believe what he heard. All of his friends and family were gone. What had seemed like three years in Tír na n-Óg was three hundred years in Ireland! The men returned to their work and Oisín felt sorry for them. They were too weak to move such a big rock. He leaned down from the horse and pushed the rock away with his mighty strength.

Just as the rock rolled away down the hill, Oisín heard a SNAP! The saddle on the horse broke and Oisín fell to the ground. Suddenly, all the weight of the 300 years fell on his shoulders. In an instant, Oisín was transformed from a great warrior into a feeble old man. The horse reared up high and ran away with such speed that he seemed to vanish. Oisín wept because he knew that he would never see Niamh or Tír na n-Óg again.

The men took pity on him and brought him to their home. Even though he was very sad, he enjoyed the company of his new friends. Most of the people of Ireland had never heard of Fionn MacCumhail or the Fianna. Oisín was soon telling them stories and poems of all the great heroes he had known, and entertaining everyone with his sweet singing voice.

It is thanks to Oisín, son of Fionn MacCumhail, that we know of the heroes of Old Ireland.