

The Salmon of Knowledge: Senior

Long ago when Fionn mac Cumhaill, the great leader of the Fianna of Ireland, was still a young boy he was sent to live with a very wise man named Finnegas. Finnegas was a poet who lived on the banks of the river Boyne and was renowned throughout Ireland for his vast knowledge.

As well as being renowned for his skills in composing and reciting poetry Finnegas knew more about the ways of the world, including the secrets of the birds and animals and plants and stars, than other man in Ireland.

It was because of his vast knowledge that Fionn had been sent to learn from Finnegas. Fionn loved to listen to the old man's wonderful stories and his many words of wisdom which he too, in time, would learn to recite. In exchange for the wisdom Finnegas would pass on to him, Fionn would help about the house, cooking, cleaning and fishing for the old man. However, despite Finnegas' vast knowledge, he did not know everything and there were times when Fionn's endless curiosity got the better of him, and he was left unable to answer the young boy's questions.

'Is there a way to know everything?' Fionn asked him. This was a question that Finnegas had asked once too and was the very reason why he now lived next to the river Boyne. It had been told by the druids of old that living in a still, dark pool in the shade of the overhanging hazel trees was the Salmon of Knowledge. It was as result of eating the nuts of these magical hazel trees that the Salmon had acquired all the knowledge of the world. And so it was that, according to prophecy, the one who would eat the Salmon would gain the

knowledge for themselves. Finnegas had been living on the edge of the river for several years now, attempting to catch the Salmon and gain such wisdom. It so happened that one day, not long after Fionn had come to study under him, Finnegas went fishing and finally caught the Salmon. 'I've caught it! I've caught it!' he cried happily.

He immediately reeled it in and ran up to Fionn with the Salmon in his arms. 'You must cook it straight away!' Finnegas ordered Fionn, dancing and skipping with excitement.

As Fionn began to set up the fire and spit in order to cook the Salmon, Finnegas warned him, 'Cook it, but whatever you do, do not eat a single bit of it!'

Fionn nodded and went about cooking the Salmon while Finnegas went to fetch some extra firewood. Upon his return Finnegas found the Salmon laid out and ready to eat. He looked at Fionn and thought he saw something different about him, as though the light of wisdom now shone in his eyes.

'Have you eaten any of the Salmon?' he asked Fionn anxiously.

'I have not!' Fionn replied.

'Have you tasted its skin?' he continued to enquire.

'I have not!' Fionn replied, 'but when I was turning it on the spit I burned my fingers, so I put my thumb into my mouth to ease the pain.'

Finnegas' heart sank. 'That's enough!' he told Fionn, 'You have tasted the Salmon of Knowledge; in you the prophecy is fulfilled. You are the one who has gained all the knowledge of the world.'

He then ordered Fionn to eat all of the Salmon.

However, when Fionn was finished he realised he didn't feel much different nor did he feel any wiser than before. When he told this to Finnegas, Finnegas replied, 'If it was your thumb you first burnt, then place it in your mouth.' Fionn did as Finnegas suggested and immediately all the knowledge of the world rushed into his head.

'You must go now! There is nothing more I can teach you,' Finnegas informed him, 'You are destined to become a wise poet, warrior and leader.'

And so it was that when Fionn grew up, he did indeed become a wise poet, warrior and leader. He became a great leader of the Fianna, the greatest band of warriors Ireland has ever known.