

## The King of Ireland's Son

1. Long ago the King of Ireland's son went out to play in the snow with his sling and his dog. While he was practicing he accidentally hit a raven. Never before had the boy seen anything as white as the snow, as black as the raven, or as red as the blood which ran from its wound.

Lamenting the injury he caused the raven the boy made a promise (*geis*) that he would not rest until he married a woman whose skin was as white as the snow, whose hair was as black as the raven, and whose cheeks and lips were as red as the blood.

At that time there was only one woman in the entire world like that, and she lived in the far off Eastern world.

2. The following morning the boy set out on his journey to the Eastern world with twenty gold coins. He was not long on his way before he came upon a funeral. Stopping to pay his respects, he noticed a man demanding payment from the mourners for the funeral expenses. Seeing the mourners wailing and crying, he realised that they had no money to give the man. Taking pity on them he reached into his pocket and offered the man ten gold coins to cover the expenses. With that, he continued on his way.

3. He soon met a short green man who asked him where he was going. The boy told him the story of the woman of the Eastern world whom he was to marry. The short green man offered his services to the boy on his journey. The boy asked the short green man about his wages, if he were to join him. On the first kiss of the boy's new wife they agreed, should their journey be successful.

4. They soon met a skilled bowman, aiming upward, at a blackbird high above them.

*The boy asked the bowman about his wages, if he were to join them. They agreed on a house and a garden, should their journey be successful.*

5. They soon met a man with his ear to the ground. When asked what he was doing he said he was listening to the grass grow!

*The boy asked the ear man about his wages, if he were to join them. They agreed on a house and a garden, should their journey be successful.*

**6.** They soon met a man with one foot on his shoulder, among a field of hares. When asked why he had one foot on his shoulder the foot man said that if he had both feet on the ground he would move so swiftly that he would disappear out of sight.

*The boy asked the foot man about his wages, if he were to join them. They agreed on a house and a garden, should their journey be successful.*

**7.** They soon met a man with a finger on one nostril, blowing a ship out to sea with the other nostril. When asked why he had a finger on one nostril the nose man said that if he were to blow with both nostrils he would sweep the ship out of the sea altogether!

*The boy asked the nose man about his wages, if he were to join them. They agreed on a house and a garden, should their journey be successful.*

**8.** They soon met a man breaking stones not with a hammer but with one hand. When asked why he was breaking stones with one hand the stone-breaker said that if he were to break them with both hands he'd make powder of them!

*The boy asked the stone-breaker about his wages, if he were to join them. On a house and a garden they agreed, should their journey be successful.*

**9.** With that the companions continued on together: the King of Ireland's son, the short green man, the bowman, the ear man, the foot man, the blow man, and the stone-breaker.

**10.** When evening came and the sky grew dark the King of Ireland's son did not know where they should pass that night. The short green man said that they should spend the night in the nearby castle belonging to a giant. When they came to the castle, the short green man drew out his staff (cuaille comhraic) and began hammering and banging it until not a single living creature in the glen was left sleeping.

*The giant came out. 'I smell a young Irishman in my little sod of country!' he exclaimed.*

*'My master is near and if he finds you he will whip the head off you!' replied the short green man.*

*With that the short green man began to grow bigger and bigger until he looked as big as the castle.*

*The giant began to tremble. 'Is your master as big as this?' he said.*

*'He is! And bigger!' said the short green man.*

*'Then hide me until morning, until your master is gone!' said the giant.*

The short green man put the giant under lock and key, and the companions all came into the castle. They spent the night there telling tales, until they sank into a peaceful slumber.

**11.** In the morning the short green man went to the giant saying that unless he should give him the black hat that lay under the head of his bed his master would come and strike his head off. The terrified giant didn't dare hesitate in giving the hat to the short green man. As he handed it over he told the little green man that any time someone puts the hat on their head they will immediately turn invisible!

**12.** With that the companions continued on together. When evening came and the sky grew dark the King of Ireland's son did not know where they should pass that night. The short green man said that they should spend the night in another nearby castle belonging to a second giant. When they came to the castle, the short green man drew out his staff and began hammering and banging it until not a single living creature in the glen was left sleeping.

*The second giant came out. 'I smell a young Irishman in my little sod of country!' he exclaimed.*

*'My master is near and if he finds you he will whip the head off you!' replied the short green man.*

*With that the short green man began to grow bigger and bigger until he looked as big as the castle.*

*The giant began to tremble. 'Is your master as big as this?' he said.*

*'He is! And bigger!' said the short green man.*

*'Then hide me until morning, until your master is gone!' said the giant.*

The short green man put the giant under lock and key, and the companions all came into the castle. They spent the night there telling tales, until they sank into a peaceful slumber.

**14.** In the morning the short green man went to the giant saying that unless he should give him the old slippers that lay under the head of his bed his master would come and strike his head off. The terrified giant didn't dare hesitate in giving the old slippers to the short green man. As he handed them over he told the little green man that any time someone puts the slippers on they will be transported immediately to any place they wish to go.

**15.** With that the companions continued on together. When evening came and the sky grew dark the King of Ireland's son did not know where they should pass that night. The short green man said that they should spend the night in another nearby castle belonging to a third giant. When they came to the castle, the short green man drew out his staff and began hammering and banging it until not a single living creature in the glen was left sleeping.

*The third giant came out. 'I smell a young Irishman in my little sod of country!' he exclaimed.*

*'My master is near and if he finds you he will whip the head off you!' replied the short green man.*

*With that the short green man began to grow bigger and bigger until he looked as big as the castle.*

*The giant began to tremble. 'Is your master as big as this?' he said.*

*'He is! And bigger!' said the short green man.*

*'Then hide me until morning, until your master is gone!' said the giant.*

The short green man put the giant under lock and key, and the companions all came into the castle. They spent the night there telling tales, until they sank into a peaceful slumber.

**16.** In the morning the short green man went to the giant saying that unless he should give him the rusty sword that lay under the head of his bed his master would come and strike his head off. The terrified giant didn't dare hesitate in giving the rusty sword to the short green man. As he handed it over he told the short green man that whatever place someone strikes a blow with that sword, even if it is made from the thickest iron, it will cut through with ease.

**17.** With that the companions continued on together. When evening came and the sky grew dark they arrived in the Eastern world, where the lady was.

**18.** There the Eastern lady asked the King of Ireland's son what it was he wanted. He said that he was looking for a wife whose skin was as white as snow, whose hair was as black as a raven, and whose cheeks and lips were are red as blood.

'You may marry me,' she said, 'if you remove the *geis* (curse) that has been placed upon me.'

**19.** The King of Ireland's son, together with all his companions, stayed in the lady's house that evening. That night she came to him and offered him a scissors. *'Here is scissors is for you!' she said, 'Unless you still have it for me by morning, the geis upon me will never be lifted and your head will be struck off.'*

She then placed a pin of slumber under his head, putting him into a deep sleep. As soon as he was asleep she took the scissors from him and brought it to the King of Poison, the one who had placed the *geis* upon her.

However, once the King of Poison had fallen asleep the short green man came with the slippers on his feet, the black hat on his head and the rusty sword in his hand. He found the scissors lying next to the King of Poison and brought it back to the King of Ireland's son.

In the morning when the Eastern lady came she was both astonished and delighted to be presented with the scissors.

**20.** In the same way she offered him a comb the following night, taking it to the King of Poison as the King of Ireland's son slept from the pin of slumber.

Again, once the King of Poison fell asleep the short green man came with the slippers on his feet, the black hat on his head and the rusty sword in his hand. He found the comb lying next to the King of Poison and brought it back to the King of Ireland's son.

In the morning when the Eastern lady came she was both astonished and delighted to be presented with the comb.

**21.** On the third night she came to the King of Ireland's son, offering him both the scissors and comb. 'Now you must take this comb and this scissors and bring them to me in the morning together with three locks of hair from the head of the King of Poison,' she told him.

As the King of Ireland's slept from the pin of slumber she took the scissors and comb to the King of Poison, reminding him that if he were to lose them, together with three locks of his hair, there would only remain two more challenges before she would be free of her *geis*.

And so that the King of Poison took the scissors and comb and put them into a rock of stone, and stood himself outside the gate to guard it.

Once King of Poison fell asleep the short green man came with the slippers on his feet, the black hat on his head and the rusty sword in his hand. With the first stroke of the sword the stone rock opened up, and with a second stroke three locks of hair flew from the King of Poison's head. He left with the scissors and comb and three lock of hair and brought them back to the King of Ireland's son.

In the morning when the Eastern lady came she was both astonished and delighted to be presented with the scissors and comb and three locks of hair. She was filled with the hope that her *geis* might at last be lifted.

**22.** However, she told the King of Ireland's son that he would never marry her unless he found someone to race against the King of Poison's runner. They must race to the well of the Western world and retrieve three bottles of the healing-balm from it. If the King of Poison's runner should come back first, the *geis* upon her would never be lifted and his head would be struck off.

The King of Poison sent an old hag to race to the well of the Western world. The short green man told the King of Ireland's son that he should send the foot man, who kept the field of hares. So it was that three cups were given to the old hag and the foot man and they both set out on their race.

It was not long before the foot man was half way back, while the old hag was only half way to the well.

‘Sit down,’ the old hag said to the foot man, when they met, ‘and have some rest! Don’t break your heart running, for the couple have just been married!’ She made him a pillow there, and laid it under his head. As soon as he had fallen asleep, she spilt the water out of his cups and went on her way.

**23.** The short green man thought they had been a long time running, and said to the ear man, ‘Lay your ear to the ground and listen for them coming!’

The ear man did so, saying ‘I heard the old woman coming, but the foot man is sleeping. I can hear him snoring!’

‘Use your eyes,’ the short green man said to the bow man, ‘and see where the foot man is!’

The bowman looked out, and said he could see the foot man sleeping with a pillow beneath his head.

‘Aim with your bow,’ said the short green man, ‘and shoot the pillow away from under his head.’

The bowman put the bow to his eye and aimed. As he let the arrow fly the pillow was swept from under the foot man’s head. The foot man woke up, startled. Finding his cups empty he knew he would have to return to the well again.

**24.** At that very moment the old hag was coming to the end of the race. As the short green man saw her approach he called to the nose man telling him to rise up and blow the old hag with a blast of wind from his nostril. The nose man did as he was told and every time the old hag got near the wind from the nose man’s nostril would knock her back. Finally, the nose man blew with both his nostrils, sending the old hag back to the Western world again.

With that the foot man arrived with three full cups and won the day!

**25.** There was great joy on the woman and she said to the king’s son, ‘There is a final trial you must undergo before my *geis* is lifted and we may be wed. You must now walk three miles, without shoes or stockings, across steel needles!’

She showed him a road three miles long, with sharp needles of steel, each as thick as a blade of grass, pointing up.

Before the King of Ireland's son set out across the needles, the short green man called to the stone-breaker. 'Go and blunt those needles!' he said.

The stone-breaker charged up the road, thrashing the needles with his fists until he had made stumps, and then powder of them all.

When he was done the King of Ireland's son walked the three miles, and gained his wife.

**26.** Just as soon as the couple married the short green man took the lady to have the first kiss as he had been promised. He took her aside and kissed her on the cheek. Suddenly serpents came springing from her body and hair which would have killed the King of Ireland's son in his sleep.

The short green man turned to the King of Ireland's son then and told him, 'The *geis* is lifted! You can have your wife now.'

The King of Ireland's son thanked the small green man for all he had done for him, asking him how he could ever repay him.

The small green man said there was no need. 'I am the man who was in the coffin that day,' he said, 'for whom you paid ten gold coins in funeral expenses. The companions, who have come with you, are servants of God, sent to help you in your journey and rescue the King of the Eastern world's daughter from the *geis* placed on her by the King of Poison. Now she is free and you are wed.'

The short green man and the other the companions went away then, and the King of Ireland's son never saw them again. He brought his wife home with him, and they spent a long happy life together.