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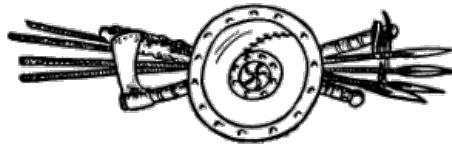




# Legendary Heroes *of* Ireland

By

HAROLD F. HUGHES



1922

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DEDICATION

TO MY FATHER

WHOSE TALES OF THE IRISH HEROES  
FIRST OPENED TO ME THE  
WONDERLAND OF  
CELTIC FOLKLORE



## TEACHER'S PREFACE

These stories are offered in the hope that they may help promote the love of reading in our boys and girls. After all, our duty in teaching reading is not in the subject matter but in the desire. If we show to the child that the art of reading is the golden key which will unlock the storehouse of life enjoyment, and give him the love for the secrets of the printed page, we may consider that our educational effort has been well spent. So the primary object in writing these stories has not been to chronicle history but to give the child something interesting and entertaining.

The early Celts have little literature other than these stories, which have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Most of the tales in this book have been taken from the Ossianic Saga. Whether Finn belongs to history or mythology detracts no jot from the absorbing interest of his exploits.

I have tried to make the story of Finn something of a connected narrative. To do this I have taken incidents from various versions; I have left out much unsuitable to children, and I have changed some incidents to conform to the modern standards of morals. The chronology of arrangement is my own, but I have tried to preserve the spirit of the originals.

No collection of Irish folk stories could be brought out were it not for the work of those many scholars who have spent years in collecting and translating the tales of the Celtic race. To our American linguist, Jeremiah Curtin, and to the Irish scholars: Sir Douglas Hyde, Dr. Joyce, Eleanor Hull, Lady Gregory, T. W. Rolleston and others, my thanks are due. Their splendid research work has made possible such a volume as this.

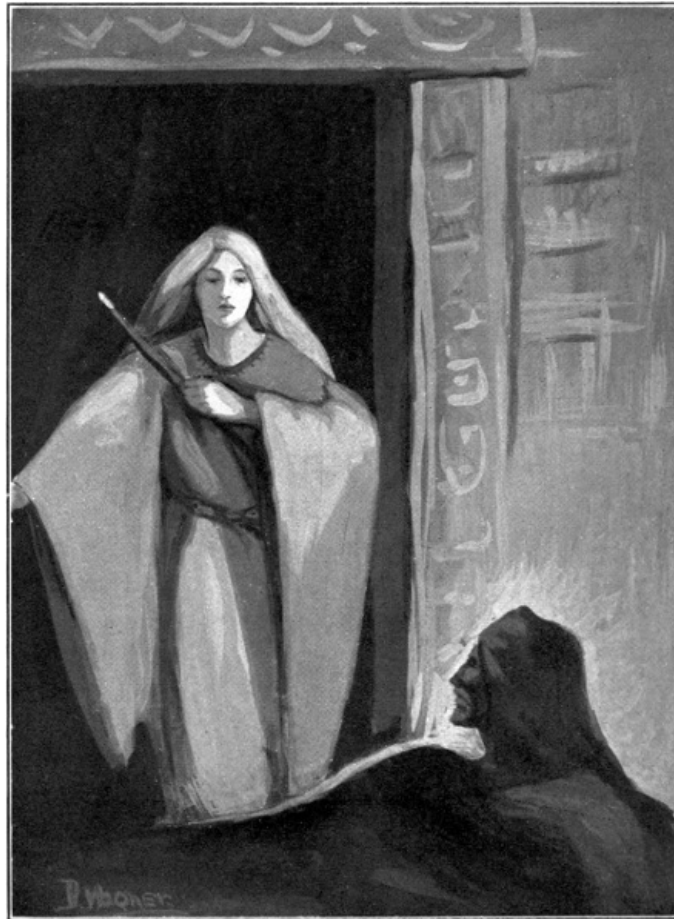
HAROLD F. HUGHES.





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That evening Cool climbed to the window

From Birth of Finn

Every race of people has its myths and hero tales. With those of the Greeks most of us are familiar. We have heard of Hercules, Perseus, Atlas and others, ever since we started to school. The early stories of a race are always entertaining as well as instructive. For that reason our school libraries contain the folk stories of the Japanese, the Norsemen, the Russians, the English, the American Indian, the negro and many others. The one people, of whose stories Americans know little, is the Celtic race, the forefathers of the Scotch and Irish of today, and the ancestors of many of us. This book is intended to make you acquainted with the ancient heroes of the Celts.

Just as King Arthur is the early hero of the Anglo-Saxon people, so is Finn MacCool the renowned hero of the Celts. Like King Arthur he had gathered together a body of heroes, all of whom performed deeds of valor. In Scotland we find stories of this same hero, only the Scotch people call him Fingal.

Most of the stories which follow are tales of the adventures of Finn and his friend, Dermot. These tales are about events which are supposed to have taken place nearly two thousand years ago. 10

No doubt you wonder how we know anything about people who lived so long ago. The very name, folk stories, explains it. Folk stories are told by the folk, or people, of the country. Sometimes we find the tales written in an ancient book, but most of them come down through the centuries by one person telling the story to another.

You know that when you hear a good story, you like to tell it to little brother or sister or some playmate. That is just the way the folk stories come to us. In some countries there were bards or poets who went around and sang of the old heroes. We often read of these men in Scotch history. The most common way of preserving the stories, however, was by the father and mother telling their children of the ancient heroes. These children grew up and repeated the tales to their own families, and so the story was preserved through the ages.

There is an old Irish legend that explains this method very nicely.

Finn had a son named Ossian, of whom you will read a great deal as we go on. This son was a poet and sang the deeds of his father in verse. The story runs that before the great battle of Gowra, Ossian had fallen in love with a fairy and had gone to Fairyland to live. He lived in this land of youth for four hundred years, growing no older. At the end of that time he wanted to go back to earth and see if he could see any of his old friends. Time went so quickly in Fairyland that he did not realize how long he had been away. 11

His fairy wife gave him a horse to ride and warned him that he must not touch a foot to the ground. Then Ossian rode away.

He came to Erin and rode through the scenes of his adventures. He was surprised not to find any of his old friends. Not only that, he found that the men were very much smaller than those of his time. He saw six of them trying to roll a stone which his father could have moved with one hand. He grew so sorry for them that he forgot all about his wife's orders. He got off his horse to move the stone. The instant he touched the ground he became a wrinkled and bent old man.

Then, the story tells us, the people took him to St. Patrick, and he told this Irish saint the stories of Finn and his companions.

It is a very pretty story to explain how these legends became known. Of course, it is not true, but it shows the imagination of the Irish people. They believe in fairies and witches and the powers of enchantment. You will find that this belief enters into all the stories. That is another thing about folk tales. Each person who tells them adds something to them.

No doubt you have been to parties where a game something like this was played: The players form a long row. Then the one on the end whispers something to his neighbor, this person whispers what he heard to the next player, and so on. The last player tells what has been told him. It is nearly always something entirely different from the story which started. 12

Folk stories grow in just that manner. The different provinces of Ireland have different versions of the stories. In some parts of the country Finn is the hero, and Dermot proves untrue to him. In another province, Dermot is the splendid man and Finn is a cruel tyrant. The stories which follow in this book are combined from those of all the provinces. This book is not a history. It is a collection of interesting stories about heroes who, possibly, never existed.

## II.

You should know something of how stories of this kind are gathered together. Many were taken down by the priests of early times, but none were ever written until nearly a thousand years ago. Undoubtedly large numbers of them have been lost by the death of the only person who knew them.

It is only in the last few years that the Irish scholars have tried to gather these tales together. There are many of these collectors of Irish hero stories. Most of them, of course, are Irish, but America has furnished one man who long will be remembered because of his work along this line. 13

Jeremiah Curtin was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1840. He died in 1906. Into those sixty-six years he crowded the work of several ordinary men. He had a great love for the languages and history. When he graduated from Harvard, he was so well acquainted with Russian that he went to St. Petersburg, now Petrograd, as Secretary of the American Legation. While there he became

interested in Russian literature and the folk stories of the people. He translated many Russian books into English and also collected a volume of their folk tales.

Many men would have been satisfied with this. Mr. Curtin was not. He became connected with the Smithsonian Institute and while there studied the folk tales of the various Indian tribes. He wrote two books of these stories.

He next took up the study of Irish folk lore. He spent a great deal of time in Ireland collecting the stories which appear in three books. Whenever he heard of some old man or woman who knew an old story, he went to that place and got the person to tell it to him, writing it down as it was told. Many times it was one he had already heard, but that could not discourage Mr. Curtin. As a result of this care his books are very valuable to the older students of folk lore.

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What an interesting life this man must have led! Think of the work he must have done to learn the many languages well enough to get the stories. We think we are well educated if we can read two or three languages beside our own. Mr. Curtin, when he died, was familiar with sixty languages!

And now that we know something about how folk lore is collected, we are ready to make the acquaintance of Finn and his Fenian warriors.

The stories of the great heroes of Ireland, or Erin as it used to be called, are gathered in groups around certain men. The Fenians whom Finn MacCool commanded from the age of ten until his death, was a body of military men about whom the best known stories are told.

These Fenians might be said to correspond to our standing army. There were three groups of a thousand men each in peace times. In time of war the number could be expanded enough to take in all who wished to fight. Some people claim that Finn and his Fenians never existed. Others say that this body of men did exist from 400 years before the birth of Christ until they were destroyed in a great battle in the year 284 A. D. Whether they formed a real army or not does not spoil our enjoyment of their deeds of bravery.

In reading the exploits of the Fenians it is necessary to remember that to the Irish mind these men were either gods or giants, many times the size of people of the present day. If you forget this you will not be able to understand how one hero can hold back a whole army of ordinary soldiers, and how strokes of their swords cut off whole hilltops and formed new valleys.

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To become a Fenian was a great honor. It was only open to men of the best families and of the highest character, and many of these were not able to pass the tests required.

In the first place a Fenian must be well educated in poetry and must be able to write it himself. In other words, he must have all the education which those days gave. Again, he must pledge himself to be kind and gentle to the weak and oppressed, to be willing to fight when challenged and to keep up the battle until he won or was killed. He must promise never to injure the common people, not to allow gold to make him false to his friends, not to accept a dowry with a wife. He must agree not to run away from nine or less champions, and his parents must pledge themselves not to seek revenge if he was killed in battle.

The physical tests were even harder to pass. The candidate must have his hair braided, take his spear in his hand and through the forest. After he was given sufficient start he was pursued by other Fenians. If he was overtaken, he was wounded and rejected. If his spear trembled, or if he broke a dry branch in his flight, that also barred him out. Then, when the trial was over, his braids were examined. If he had shaken them out of position, proving that he had had to work hard to get away, he had to give up all hopes of joining.

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Another test consisted of placing him in a hole up to his waist and giving him a shield in one hand and a hazelwood stick in the other. Nine warriors with nine spears formed in a circle and threw at him. If he was wounded he was not accepted. No wonder that a man who passed such tests was ready to face great numbers of ordinary soldiers.

A Fenian had also to be very nimble and supple. One of the tests was to put up a lath on the level of his eyebrows and another farther on, just the height of his knees. The man had to go at full speed, leaping over the first one and going under the second without slackening his pace. The boys who read this have only to try this test to realize that a Fenian would be a winner on a track team of today.

It was men who could pass such tests who made up the kind of heroes commanded by Cool, Gaul of Morna and Finn. These are the three great leaders mentioned in the stories. Cool made them a mighty band; Gaul held them together after the death of Cool; Finn was the last and greatest leader.

The first great chief of the Fenians was Cool. He was a mighty warrior and splendid hero. He it was who organized these men into an army of strength, which he governed wisely but sternly.

Over Cool was Conn, the High King, known as Conn the Hundred Fighter, because he had been victorious in a hundred battles. It was Conn whom Cool and his men had to swear to honor and defend. Conn's principal city, the one in which he held his court, was known as Tara. These facts it is necessary to know before we can understand the story which follows.

In one part of the kingdom, in the castle of Alma, dwelt an old chief and his beautiful daughter, Murna. The girl was kept within the castle under heavy guard and no man was allowed to see or speak to her. There was a reason for this harsh treatment. When she was born a prophet told her father that her son would take his land and title from him. As the old chief was very fond of his castle he thought he would make a grandson impossible by never allowing his daughter to marry.

One day Cool rode by the castle and saw Murna at the upper window. He was greatly struck by her beauty.

"Who is the maiden?" he asked one of his advisers.

"It will do you little good to know," replied the man. "Her father has forbidden any man to wed her."

"The men of this district must have little spirit to allow such a prize to go unwon," remarked Cool.

"You would not think so if you saw the number of guards always in place to make such a thing impossible," was the reply.

Cool said no more. That evening he went back to the castle, overpowered the guards and climbed to the window at which he had seen the girl. When she saw this mighty hero at her window, she let him in and they talked together. Cool was already in love with her from having seen her beautiful face, but after he had talked with her and found her as gentle and sweet as she was beautiful, he vowed that he would have no one but her for a wife. Any girl of Ireland would have been proud to be wooed by such a splendid hero. The maiden was sure that she could never love any one else, so Cool took her away. They were married that very night.

You can imagine how the old chief felt about this theft of his daughter and her marriage. He saw now that the prophecy might come true. He hastened to the High King and told his story.

This put Conn in a puzzling position. As a man he sympathized with Cool, but as a King he saw that the chief was justified in complaining. He ordered Cool to appear before him.

"Do you deny that you stole the chief's daughter for your wife?" he asked.

"I do not," said Cool stoutly.

"Do you think that the proper conduct for a Fenian?" asked the King.

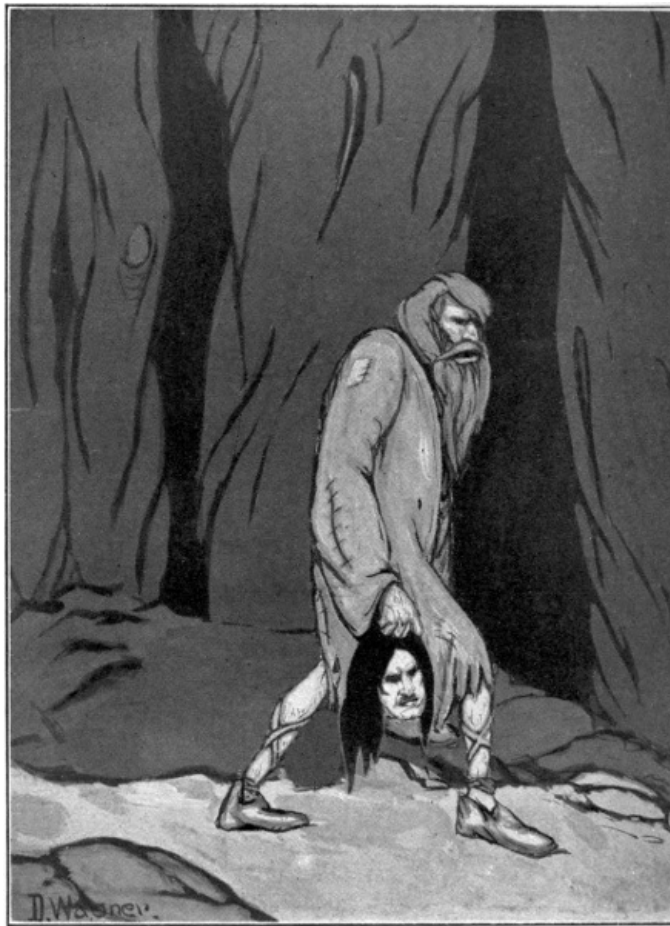
"Is it not the rule of the Fenians to help the weak who are oppressed?" asked Cool in answer.

"This maiden was not oppressed," said the old chief. "She was my daughter and under my protection."

"Any maiden is oppressed who is not allowed to love and be loved by the man of her choice," said Cool. "If you had permitted anyone to seek her in marriage she would not have been taken from you by force."

King Conn hated to decide. He did not wish to offend the leader of his army, nor could he afford to make an enemy of the old chief and lose his fealty. He finally decided that he could replace his leader more easily, so he ruled that Cool must give back the maiden.

Now Cool had been greatly in love with Murna when he took her from the castle, but having her for his wife had made her more dear to him. He decided that life would not be worth living without her. He defied Conn to take her from him.



The hermit killed Cool and took his head to Gaul

From Birth of Finn

With his beautiful bride and those Fenians who were more loyal to him than to the High King, Cool fled to the forest. There he defended himself and for some time kept at bay the forces of Conn. 21

After Cool fled the leadership of the Fenians was given to Gaul of Morna, another brave warrior. In the course of the battle Cool and the new leader met in single combat. All day long they fought fiercely and bravely; Gaul to show himself brave enough to lead the army and Cool for his wife and his happiness. In the evening Cool weakened and he received a wound which made it impossible to fight on. Gaul thought too much of his old leader to kill him while he lay wounded, so he withdrew.

It so happened that another witnessed this battle. It was an old hermit who lived by himself in the forest. This man was reputed to have great knowledge. It proved that he had also a great desire to make himself popular with the High King. He did what Gaul would not do—he killed the wounded Cool and took his head to Gaul.

In place of receiving the praise he wanted, he found Gaul greatly displeased. The hermit was driven out of the camp as a coward, with sticks and stones hurled after him as a reward.

With the defeat of their leader the rebel Fenians surrendered, and the young widow was left without protection. She must either go back to her father or hide in the forest. The latter course was the one she chose. 22

Poor girl, she was not used to such treatment. She became very weak and ill. At last she gave up and approached an old hut in the forest. Here she was taken in by an old woman, who fed her and nursed her.

It was in this hut that the baby, who was to become such a great hero, was born. Murna stayed in the hut until the baby could be left, fearful that each day would bring the searchers sent out by her father, who would kill her child. She finally decided that the baby would be safer if she went back to the castle of Alma. She pledged the old woman to raise the child but to tell no one who he was. The woman promised and Murna went back to her father.

Many stories are told of the boyhood of this hero. He grew tall and straight with long fair hair and bright blue eyes. Because of his complexion he was called Finn, which means "The Fair".

Living among the wild things of the forest he grew like them. No deer could run away from him, he could run at full speed without cracking a dry branch, he could track any animal by the prints on the forest floor, while his eyes were as keen as those of an eagle.

An early adventure of the boy reminds one of the story told of Putnam, our hero of Revolutionary days. I refer to the story of the killing of the wolf. In the case of Finn it was a wildcat. While he was still a very young child his friends of the forest were greatly annoyed by the visits of a vicious wildcat. This animal made steady attacks on the flocks and herds of the people of the forest.

The men hunted for the animal without result. No one thought of Finn as a hunter and he told no one of his intention. With his knowledge of tracking he found the trail of the wildcat and followed it to its lair in a deep cave. Without hesitation he went right in until he found the animal.

There was no space in the cave for the use of a sword, so Finn did not draw it. Instead he attacked the animal with his bare hands. He caught it by the throat and held it until it ceased its struggles. Then he carried the dead beast back and showed it to the surprised residents of the forest. Its skin afterwards became part of his costume.

When he was old enough for books, the old woman gave him into the charge of the hermit of the forest. This man taught him the "Twelve Books of Poetry", which seems to be about all the people of those days learned from books. Finn was a bright pupil and very early became skilful enough to write poetry himself.

I am afraid that the hermit took little interest in the teaching of his pupil. You see, the man was deeply interested in gaining wisdom for himself. He had placed his hut on the bank of a little stream, not, as you suppose, so that he would have water for cooking, but because this was the stream mentioned in the prophecy as the one up which the Salmon of Knowledge would come.

In the folk stories of many races we find the salmon considered as the wisest of fishes. In Ireland, however, there was the story of this particular salmon which would some day swim up the stream. The man who ate the flesh of this fish would be ever afterwards the wisest man in the country.

The prophecy said that the fish would come when the man who was to eat him arrived. As no one knew who this was to be, the hermit had hopes that the fish would come to him.

Finn helped to watch for this wonderful fish. This was a task he loved, and it was one to which he was well suited on account of his keen eyes. One afternoon, while he lay on the bank, a big, beautiful salmon swam slowly toward him. The sunlight glistened on his scales that shone like silver.

The big fish swam right in front of him, turning back and forth in the sunlight and showing very plainly that it did not intend swimming away. At last Finn remembered that it was a fish he was waiting for, so he reached into the water for it. The salmon offered no fight, but allowed the boy to lift him out upon the bank.

Of course the hermit was delighted to see the fish. He knew at once that it was the Salmon of Knowledge. He felt that he was already the wisest man in the country. But even with knowledge so close to him he still had a desire to have some one else do the work. He set his pupil at the task of cooking the fish, cautioning him against eating a bite of it. Then he went off to take a nap.

Finn sat before the fire turning the fish slowly. He, too, had heard of the Salmon of Knowledge, but he never guessed that this was the one. Neither did he have any idea that he was the person of the prophecy. He did not even know who he was, nor anything about his father or mother. As he turned the smoking fish he got his thumb against the meat and burnt it severely. To ease the pain he put it in his mouth and sucked the sore thumb.

That was all that was necessary to give him knowledge. He sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing with anger. Buckling on his sword he went in and roused the hermit from his sleep. What the man saw in his pupil's eyes frightened him.

"Did you eat that salmon?" demanded the hermit.

"I but burnt my finger on it and sucked the place," said Finn. "That was enough. I know now that I am the son of Cool and that you killed him while he lay wounded. Get up and defend yourself, for I am about to avenge my father!"

Finn was but a boy, but already the strength of a champion was coming to him. The hermit fought for his life, but he was no match for the son of the man he had treacherously killed. He quickly paid for his foul deed, and Finn ate the Salmon of Knowledge, as it was intended he should.

From that time on he had more wisdom than the wisest man in Ireland. Not only that, but when in times of stress he desired to know the outcome of a battle or an adventure, by biting the thumb which had been burned he could tell the result. In other stories you will see how this knowledge aided him. Of course, you will wonder why he ever made mistakes with such a gift. I am unable to tell you that. Many of the adventures we read of a wise man would never have attempted. Probably he only used this thumb in times of great importance for fear that if he used it for everything the great gift would leave him.



A tremendous gathering of the men of Erin had come together at the city of Tara, the central city of the realm. The Fenians were camped in a circle around the outskirts. At night the lights of their campfires made a circle of fire as though to protect it from danger.

Conn, the High King, was holding court in the great banquet hall where a thousand of the chiefs and champions were gathered with him. This hall was seven hundred sixty feet long, ninety feet wide and built of hewn logs. Down each side ran a double row of benches with hewn tables in front of them. In each row were two hundred fifty of the finest manhood of Erin. Their weapons and shields rested against the walls behind them while they ate. Down the center was a row of fires over which, on spits, great roasts of meat were cooking. An army of cooks were constantly busy, tending the fires, turning the spits and carrying food to the tables.

At the end of the hall on a raised platform sat Conn, his son Arthur, and Gaul of Morna, leader of the Fenians. They were in earnest consultation.

One would have thought that such a gathering of heroes at a feast would have been a jolly one. It was not so. A deep silence hung over all. Men ate in silence with gloomy faces and downcast eyes, sad because they felt that it would be their last gathering in that splendid hall.

Suddenly a voice rang out through the silence. Clear and firm it was, so that every word was heard the length of the hall.

"Conn, High King of Erin, a lonely and disinherited youth, without money and without friends, claims thy hospitality!"

The men of Erin looked at the newcomer in surprise. They saw a youth about ten years of age, clad in the skins of the forest animals. Hanging at his belt in front was a great sword, while his skin covered shield hung over his shoulders at the back. His fair hair fell to his shoulders, while his blue eyes caught the glint of light from the spears along the wall and shot it back like flashes of sunlight. It was Finn, son of Cool, appearing for the first time before the Fenians.

The High King had matters of too much weight on his mind to take much heed of the boy who claimed what no king at that time would refuse—a place at the table and a bed. He motioned to Finn to take his place with the others and went on with his discussion.

Finn ate with the other men of Erin. He said no word until he had finished his meal. Then he arose and once more addressed the High King.

"I know it is not customary for a stranger to note that there is anything wrong in the house of his host, but I am impressed by your look of sadness and the silence of the men of Erin. Is aught amiss that may be told to a stranger?"

"Our troubles are not secret, though it shames me to tell them," answered the High King. "Tonight is the time set for the destruction of Tara, and I am powerless to save it. Each year for nine years, at the midnight hour of this night, the giant Midna appears and throws balls of fire at the city until it is destroyed. Each year I have rebuilt it, only to know that my work is to last but for a year. The women and children have been sent away. Only the Fenians remain to witness my shame. Do you wonder, O Youth, that we are sick at heart?"

"And is there no brave champion or youth anxious to prove his bravery who can go out and meet this giant?" asked Finn.

"Alas, no," sighed the High King. "It is not that the men of Erin are lacking in bravery. Many have tried without result. When Midna is ready to destroy, he plays fairy music upon his pipes, and not a man can stay awake. When sleep leaves our eyes he is gone, and the city is a heap of ashes. We watch again tonight, but we have no hopes of success."

Of course Finn, having eaten the Salmon of Knowledge, knew this as well as anybody. His purpose in asking for information was to obtain a promise from Conn.

"What shall be the reward of him who slays the giant and saves the city?" asked Finn.

"If such a feat be possible, no reward that he shall ask will be refused," answered the High King.

"Even to the return of my inheritance?" asked Finn.

"Yes, fair youth," answered Conn. "Even if your inheritance be my crown, and my son and I must become your vassals, it shall be returned to you."

"Is that your promise, O King, made before all these men of Erin?" insisted Finn.

"It is," declared the king, stepping down and putting his hand in that of the boy. "My hand is my pledge that I will do as I promise."

"Then I shall attempt the trial," said Finn.

He waved back all offers of spears and shields from the men of Erin and went out by himself into the darkness. He sought out a place in a dark grove and waited quietly. Soon a man appeared, bearing a large cloak and a heavy spear. The spear handle was studded with nails of gold, but the point was incased in a leather covering. The man gave Finn directions for the use of the articles and disappeared.

Soon the lights in the banquet hall went out, as the champions went to their posts in the circle defending the city. No man spoke to his neighbor. That would have been useless since every man

had his ears filled with wax in the hopes that he might shut out the sound of the strange, sweet music that put all to sleep.

Finn climbed a hill overlooking the city. His knowledge told him that here it was the giant would come. Soon he heard in the distance the sound of pipes. The music lulled his senses, his eyelids drooped, his head began to nod. Not till then did he take the leather covering from the spear head. It glowed like fire and little tongues of light shot out in all directions. From the spear came the sound of many voices crying out together. Finn pressed the point to his forehead. The pain of the burning was stronger than the spell of the music.

Soon the lights of the circle began to reel and go out as one after another of the Fenians came under the spell of the music. At last only the lights of the stronger chiefs were burning.

The music then changed to the sweetness of strings. Once again Finn had to press the spear head to his forehead. The lights went out one by one until there was but one left, that of Conn, and it was reeling like that of a drunken man. Then it, too, went out. Tara was unprotected by her army.

And now Finn heard the sound of heavy feet. There was a splashing of water as of one crossing a river. Finn looked in the direction of the sound and beheld a mighty mountain of man ascending the hill on which he stood. It was the giant Midna. 33

Midna looked over the city lying at his mercy and laughed aloud. He blew from his mouth a red fire ball which was to begin the destruction of the city. Finn reached out his cloak and caught the ball in its folds, where it died out harmlessly. The amazed giant shot another and another at the city, but not one passed the folds of Finn's cloak.

At first, I suppose, the giant thought that he was shooting a poor grade of fire balls that evening. When, however, he looked to the place where they disappeared and saw Finn catching them in his cloak, he let out a roar of fear and ran back toward his home as quickly as he could. Probably he had heard some prophecy that told him of the coming of this boy, dressed in skins; maybe he saw that Finn's powers were greater than his; anyway he did not pause for battle, but ran with all the speed he possessed.

Finn gave chase. He was, you remember, very fleet of foot, but the giant's legs were many times longer and the distance grew between them. The spear flamed brightly and seemed struggling to get free.

"Go then, if you will," cried Finn, as he hurled it after the fast disappearing giant.

Like a meteor in the night sky the spear sped through the darkness and disappeared. Finn ran on after it. He found the giant dead at the door of his cave in the hillside. The spear had passed through his body and disappeared. 34

With his sword Finn took the enchanter's head as proof that he had won the battle. When he passed the place where he had dropped the cloak he found nothing. Like the spear, it disappeared when its work was done. Finn placed the head of the giant on a pole in front of the banquet hall so that all might see it in the morning.

And then, after it was all over, he became very faint and sick. The use of the weapons of magic had taken all the strength out of his body. He reeled like a drunken man toward the spring which furnished water for the banquet hall. Finn had another power of which I must tell you. By bringing water in his cupped hands to one sick or wounded he could restore him to health. He used this power now and drank from his own hands. At once his sickness passed. Then he lay down and slept.

In the morning he woke early and gave a mighty shout.

Even though their ears were filled with wax the Fenians could not fail to hear his voice. They struggled from their sleep and rubbed their eyes in astonishment to see, not a heap of smoking ruins, but Tara, resplendent in the morning sun.

They came with all speed, Conn and Gaul in the lead, to the spot where Finn stood pointing at the head of their late enemy. 35

"Who are you, brave youth?" asked Conn. "You are no common man since you have done what no one else could do."

Then Finn drew himself up and in a loud voice cried:

"I claim my inheritance—the castle of Alma and the leadership of the Fenians. I am Finn, son of Cool, and these things belong to me in my right."

"What I have promised I will fulfill," declared Conn. "I give you your inheritance the more willingly because your father was my friend and loyal subject until I decided unfairly against him."

Then Gaul of Morna gave up the leadership of the Fenians and put his hand in that of Finn to show that he was willing to be his friend and follower. The other leaders followed his example. It must have gone hard with some of these mighty chiefs to swear fealty to a ten year old boy. The only thing that made such a thing possible was that Finn had done something no other of them could do and had entered the class of a champion by killing the giant.

Thus Finn MacCool became the leader of the Fenians.

This story is one told by the Irish peasants in explaining a bridge of rock off the northern coast of their country. It is a typical Finn story, showing that leader's strength and his wisdom. The giant who had a secret of strength is found in the folk lore of many nations. No doubt you remember the Bible hero, Samson, who lost his strength with the cutting of his long hair. You may compare him with the Scottish giant.

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When Finn was not training his men or traveling in search of adventure, he used to visit the old woman who had raised him. The stories do not mention his ever having seen his real mother. The foster-mother takes her place. Finn built a cottage for her in the northern part of the country and saw to it that she never needed anything.

One day, while visiting the woman, he stood on the rocky coast looking out over the ocean. Over on the coast of Scotland he saw a giant of tremendous proportions. This fellow seemed to be driving pillars into the ocean and was working very hard. He saw Finn in the distance and called out:

"You might as well settle up your business, because when I get through with you there will not be much of you left to talk about!"

The giant's voice was a mighty roar which carried nicely over the miles separating them. Now Finn had heard of this giant and the threat did not frighten him in the least. He called back in a voice nearly as strong as the giant's own:

"Come over any time you like. You'll need more than a bridge to take you back after I get through with you."

The giant said no more, so Finn went back to the cottage. He knew that his men had boasted to the Scottish people about the great strength of their leader. He also knew that the Scotch giant was anxious to settle the question as to which was the better man. Now, Finn was afraid of no man. Having bested every champion in Ireland he was always anxious to try his strength against any new hero who appeared.

Each morning he went out and watched the giant building the bridge across the channel. When the man began to get nearer, Finn got an idea of his size. He was at least four times the size of the Irish hero and the way he handled the great stone pillars showed that his strength was tremendous. Finn saw that if the giant got hold of him as he did a rock pillar, he would have little chance of escaping alive.

As I have told you, Finn was no coward. You also know that he was no fool. He was noted for wisdom as well as strength. He saw that a combat at close quarters with such a mountain of muscle would be foolish. He began to devise plans for getting the better of the giant when the bridge should be finished.

When he saw that the work would last but a few days more he no longer went to the shore but kept at home out of sight. He enlisted the aid of his foster-mother in the preparations for the giant's arrival. He brought in a large stone as big as a water bucket and placed it on a shelf in the cottage. Then he had the woman make, from the whey of sour milk, a ball large enough to fill his two hands. This he placed near the rock.

Next he had the woman bake several cakes of meal. A few were just the ordinary ones such as they ate regularly, but in the middle of the others he had her put plates of solid iron. These cakes were placed in the cupboard close at hand. When you see how these different things were used you will see that Finn had a perfect plan worked out.

Then Finn told his foster-mother all the things she must do and in what order each was to come.

"I fear that he will be too much for you," said the woman.

"He would be as he is," declared Finn. "By biting my thumb I learn that the secret of his strength is in one of his fingers—which one I cannot tell. It shall be your task to find out the finger."

At last the day came on which the bridge was completed. A messenger was sent out to give the giant directions for reaching the cottage, while Finn himself, dressed as a baby, got into the big cradle he had built for the purpose.

Soon the doorway darkened. The great giant stood there looking in. He was an ugly and terrible looking fellow with two great teeth sticking out of his jaw like those of a walrus. The doorway was a large one, but the giant filled it, shutting out the light behind him.

"I am looking for the fellow who calls himself Finn MacCool," roared the giant in a voice that shook the walls of the house.

Finn's foster-mother sat calmly rocking the cradle and working on some clothes she was mending. To look at her one would have thought that the visit of a giant was an everyday occurrence.

"And who might you be?" she asked.

"That's no matter," growled the giant. "I've come from Scotland to see him and I'm in a hurry."

"Oh, you must be that foolish fellow who thinks he wants to have a trial with Finn," suggested the woman.

"Foolish!" roared the giant. "Show me where he is and you will soon find out which one is the foolish one!"

"Come right in," said the woman. "I am very sorry, but Finn is away and will not be back until tomorrow. He waited for you as long as he could. You see, you were so long in coming he decided that you had become frightened and had turned back, so he went off to attend to some business. Just as he left he said to me, 'If that fellow from Scotland gets here while I am gone, treat him well and get him to stay. I would not miss knocking a trial out of him at any cost.'"

"Well, he won't miss me," answered the giant. "I'll wait."

"Come right in then," said the woman. "I will give you a bite to eat."

The giant thrust himself through the doorway into the room. Inside, where he could straighten himself up, he looked more terrible than before. As there was no seat in the cottage big enough for him he leaned against the wall, which bulged out with his weight. The woman busied herself before the fire.

"Who is that?" asked the giant, pointing to Finn in the cradle.

"That's Finn's little baby," answered the woman. "I wish you would be more quiet while you are in here. The baby is just beginning to cut his teeth, and he is very cross if he awakens suddenly."

The giant really tried to soften his voice, but the result was very funny. When he was speaking very softly, his voice was like that of a fog horn in a coast light house.

"Dear me," sighed the woman after a while. "This fire draws so poorly! The wind is in the wrong direction. If Finn were here he would turn the house around so that the fire would do better."

"What Finn can do will be only a small task for me," said the giant.

He went outside, took the house by one corner and turned it so that it faced in a different direction. You can believe that the woman was thoroughly frightened to see this exhibition of strength. She wondered what chance Finn would have against such a man. Still she believed in his wisdom, so she continued to carry out her instructions. When the giant came back she seemed very calm.

"Well, how is that?" asked the giant when he came in again.

"The fire draws better," she admitted, "but you did it very clumsily. I thought you were going to shake the house to pieces. Finn lifts it around so easily that he jars not a thing on the shelves. But of course you are not nearly so strong as Finn."

The giant was so crestfallen that he had nothing to say for some time.

"Oh, dear," cried the woman a little later. "I am all out of water. Finn promised to split open the rock of the spring before he left, but he forgot all about it. I wonder if you could do it."

"Of course I can," said the giant. "Show me the rocks."

The woman took up a bucket and led him to a place where two rocky hills sent up their peaks very close together.

"That is the place," she said. "Finn intended pulling them apart when he had time so that we could have water nearby."

The giant put a foot against one peak and took the other in his hands. With a mighty heave he separated the two hills and let the water stream out between them. The woman filled her bucket and went back to the house, the giant following her.

"How did that suit you?" he asked.

"You did that very well," said the woman. "But of course that is hardly a man's job."

The giant seemed to feel keenly the fact that his strength made no impression on the woman. He looked around the room to see if he could find something else to talk about. He saw the big rock on the shelf.

"Perhaps you will tell me why you keep that rock on the shelf?" he asked.

"Oh, that," said the woman as if it could be of no importance, "that is just a little trick of Finn's. He uses it to practice on in the mornings."

"Ho! Ho!" laughed the giant. "Why should he practice with such a rock as that?" He picked it up and tossed it from hand to hand as though it were an orange.

"He keeps up the strength of his fingers with it," answered the woman. "Each morning he squeezes the water out of a rock. If you are the man Finn is you can do the same."

The giant took the stone in his two hands and squeezed with all his might and main. Of course no water could come out of a solid rock. The first finger of his right hand sank into the stone with his efforts.

"Your one finger has a little strength," said the woman. "If the rest of you had the force of that finger, you might get a few drops."

"It is that finger which gives me my strength," the foolish giant told her. Once more he took up the rock and squeezed the rock harder than ever with no result. The baby in the cradle set up a lusty cry.

"Poor baby," said the woman. "He is sorry for you. His father lets him practice on a small rock. See what he can do."

She gave Finn the ball of whey. Finn took it in his two hands and squeezed it, letting the water stream on the floor. The giant was amazed.

"It's a pretty strong baby," he admitted.

"It would have to be to belong to Finn MacCool," said the woman.

The giant seemed to be thinking deeply. Perhaps he doubted his wisdom in coming to try conclusions with the father of such a baby.

Soon Finn's foster-mother took one of the cakes from the cupboard and handed it to the giant.

"Take this," she said. "It will help stay your appetite until I get you something better."

The giant thanked her and bit down into the cake. As it was one of those with the iron core, all he succeeded in doing was to break off two of his teeth. He took the cake out of his mouth and felt his jaw.

"What's the matter?" asked the woman. "Maybe those cakes are too hard for you. Finn wouldn't eat them because they were too soft. I'll get you another one."

She passed the giant one more of the iron-filled cakes. Once more he bit into it and again he lost some teeth. He went to the door to spit them out. He did not seem to care for these cakes.

"You say Finn doesn't like cakes as soft as that?" he asked.

"He won't touch them," she answered. "He leaves them for the baby."

She took one of the ordinary cakes and gave it to Finn in the cradle. The giant looked on to see what happened. Finn ate the cake ravenously.

The giant was more puzzled than ever. He called for another cake and bit into it with all the strength of his jaws. It would be hard to tell just how many teeth he lost this time, but he could not get a bite off the cake. The woman gave Finn another and again it went down in a hurry.

"And you say he is just getting his teeth?" asked the giant.

"Just a few have come," she answered.

"I'd like to have a feel of such teeth," said the giant.

He put his strong finger in Finn's mouth and felt for the teeth. This was just what Finn had been waiting for. As soon as the finger was in his mouth he clamped down his teeth and bit it off.

With the loss of his finger the giant's extraordinary strength left him. Finn tore off the bed clothes and set upon him like a whirlwind. The walls bulged out. Most of the house was ruined. Finn's foster-mother watched from the outside of the house. Soon she had the satisfaction of seeing the giant come dashing out of the house with Finn hammering him as he ran.

Only the fact that the giant's legs were very long saved him from a worse beating. He got out on his bridge as fast as he could. Nor did he slow down until he got a good distance from the Irish shore. Then he threw down the pillars as fast as he could so that Finn would be unable to follow him.

The giant never tried to come back. He cleared out all the pillars on the Scottish side, but, you can well believe, he never went near the Irish shore again. To this day you can still see them standing out into the water, just as he left them in his hurry. People call the remaining pillars "The Giant's Causeway" and this is the story they tell as to how it happens to be there.



The Black Druid appeared in the form of Finn

From the Story of Saba

Finn always enjoyed a hunting excursion. In those days, when all the fighting was done with sword and spear, hunting was a different sport from what it is today. All the champions had fleet hounds, and they, themselves, from their training in speed, lagged little behind the dogs in the chase.

Finn had two beautiful hounds, Bran and Skolawn, which went with him at all times. He was very fond of them both. The stories tell that there were only two times in his life that he shed tears, and one of these was at the death of Bran.

One day Finn was out on the chase when the hounds gave tongue and set off at a rapid pace. You may be sure that Finn was not far behind them. When he came to a little glade among the trees, he saw a peculiar sight. There, on the turf beside a little stream, stood a beautiful doe. Finn raised his spear, but the strange behavior of the dogs stayed his hand. Instead of rushing at the deer, they approached her gently and licked the hair of her neck and shoulders.

The other Fenians came up and would have killed the animal had not Finn stopped them.

"No", he cried. "She shall not be killed! If the dogs do not wish to harm her no one else shall."

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When Finn went back to his camp, the deer followed him with his dogs. When he went into his house, she lay down on the outside.

That night he awoke suddenly to find standing at his bedside the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Who are you?" he stammered, struggling from his sleep and rubbing his eyes.

"I am Saba, O Finn," answered the maiden. "I am the deer you spared today."

"The deer!" exclaimed Finn.

"That shape was put upon me by the Black Druid because I would not become his wife. I have wandered in the forest, pursued by man and beast, and many times I have nearly lost my life. I should have given up all hope had not a kindly slave of the Druid told me that if I could come safely into your camp I would be freed from the enchantment. I feared both dogs and men, but I trusted myself to your two hounds, which seemed to realize my helplessness."

"Have no fear, fair Saba," said Finn. "The Fenians fear no enchantment, and you will be safe while under our protection."

Then Finn called his servants and had them prepare a room for the maiden. The remainder of the night he spent in dreams of the beautiful girl, who had come to him for protection.

Next morning Finn did not go out on the chase. He stayed in camp and talked to Saba. He found her even more beautiful in the daylight. The thought that she had to come to him for aid, added to her many charms, caused him to neglect everything for her. It ended by them both falling deeply in love with one another.

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The feast for the wedding of Finn and Saba was an event in the life of the Fenians. Never had such a celebration been held in Ireland. Conn, the High King, and his son, Cormack, came. It could safely have been said that no king nor prince ever had a finer wedding or a more beautiful bride.

For months Finn would not leave his young wife. Adventures had no call to him; hunting had no charms. The love of this couple is one of the most beautiful ones in history.

But later there came a call to duty. Word came to Finn that the Danes had landed on the north coast of Erin, and that the Fenians were battling without their leader. This Finn could not allow. He got out his weapons and shield, mounted his horse and left for the scene of the battle.

His farewell to Saba was very touching. That she might have perfect protection while he was absent, he left behind a guard of some of his bravest men, with cautions that they must give their lives rather than let her come under the power of the Black Druid.

For eight days and nights he fought the Danes. At the end of that time, with the foe driven back into the sea, he hastened to his young bride. His heart was filled with joyousness at the thought of being with her again.

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But when he approached his home, he saw his men standing around in open-mouthed astonishment. Noting their look of fear, he called the chief of them to him.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Why is it my men look at me in such surprise. Did they not expect me to return?"

The chief seemed puzzled, too. "Were you not here three days ago?" he asked.

"Certainly not," answered Finn. "Where is Saba? Did the Black Druid—"

"I am fearful, O Finn, that it was indeed he," replied the chief. "Three days ago we saw you approaching with your two dogs at your side. Your wife went joyously forth to meet you. The man we thought was you took her up behind him, and then all disappeared in a mist. If it was not you, it must have been the Druid appearing in your shape."

Finn, with his heart sad within him, searched every place from one end of Erin to the other, but without success. It was too true. His wife had disappeared as into a mist. It was undoubtedly the work of the Black Druid.



The boy stood with his back to the tree waiting for the hounds to attack

From the Story of Saba

Finn throughout all his life never ceased to mourn for Saba, nor to search for her. Six years after her disappearance, while hunting in the forest, he came upon a wild boy with straggly hair and fierce eyes. His only clothing was the skins of beasts. The hounds had found him, and when Finn came up, the boy was standing with his back to a tree, waiting to strangle the hounds if they came at him.

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The sight reminded Finn of his own boyhood days. He called off the dogs and took the boy home with him. At first the little fellow was too timid and unused to language to speak. Gradually, however, his fear left him and he became able to tell of his life in the forest.

He could remember a woman who had dwelt with him in a cave. A dark man had come and pleaded with her for several days, but always she had refused to do what the man asked. At last he had become angry, had left the cave and had never returned. The little boy remembered that he had never seen the woman again. After that he had been tended by a beautiful deer.

Then Finn knew that the woman was Saba and that the wild boy was his own son. He understood what the boy could not. The Black Druid had enticed his wife away and tried once more to get her to marry him. When she persistently refused him, he had turned her back into a deer.

Once more Finn searched the forest, hoping that he might again find the gentle deer, which had come to him before. His quest was without result. Possibly the Druid saw to it that she should never get near him, but it was more likely that some hunter had killed her. Finn mourned her as dead and gave his attention to the raising of his boy.

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He named the child Ossian, which means Little Faun. He taught him the poetry of the day and trained him in feats of arms. Ossian grew up to be a worthy son of his father. In all the later battles we read of what a splendid fighter he was. He and his son, Oscar, were always in the front in time of danger.

But Ossian was not only a great warrior. He inherited his father's love for poetry and the ability to write it. We have great numbers of stories about the deeds of Finn and the Fenians, and the greater number are written by the poet, Ossian.

Not all the warriors of the Fenians were noted for their bravery. It is now necessary that we become acquainted with Conan, the unheroic member of the band. The stories do not tell how he ever passed his entrance trials, or why he was allowed to remain a member. He did many things the Fenians considered as unworthy of them.

Conan was a man with an evil tongue. He never had a good word for any one. No matter what his companions did, Conan would never have a word of praise for them. He would make sneering remarks about the feat. This did not mean that he would have done better himself. Far from it! He was a great coward and shirked any task which had any danger attached to it.

The fact that he had lost all his hair gave him his name. But there was something else about him that gave the Fenians a great deal of amusement. Whenever his armor was cut at the back, it showed everyone that he had the back of a sheep. When you hear how he got such a back, you will not wonder why the Fenians enjoyed the joke so much.

One day Finn, Conan and several other heroes were out hunting. All day long they had followed the chase, and in the afternoon they arrived in a new country, before a beautiful castle. Seeing no one around they went in. They found themselves in a large room, down the center of which ran a big table loaded with food. Along the sides of the table were rows of high-backed chairs.

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As there was no one around, and as the feast seemed to have been just prepared, the men decided that it had been placed there for them. They sat down and began to eat. It was a delicious meal.

Suddenly something about the room made Finn look up from his food. When they had come in, the ceiling had been high and richly decorated. Now it was changing into the smoke-stained roof of a hut. Finn knew then that they had walked into an enchanted house, put there just to trap them. He called out a warning to his companions and ordered them all outside immediately.

When they were free from the house, and saw the great change that had taken place in it, they were, thankful for Finn's wisdom in getting them out before it had been too late.

But they were not all out. Conan was still in the room eating like a pig. They called to him, urging him to hurry. He refused to leave such a fine array of food. At last two of the Fenians rushed in and took him by the arms. When they pulled at him they found that the enchantment was already beginning to work. He was growing fast to the back of the chair.

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Conan was now thoroughly alarmed. He begged the men to pull him loose. The two Fenians pulled with all their might. With a mighty wrench they freed him, but his shirt and the skin of his back had grown fast to the chair.

He was in a very painful condition. Something had to be done to relieve him. He just lay on the ground and moaned and groaned.

"Kill a sheep and cover the wound with the skin of the animal," ordered Finn.

The men did his bidding. The skin of the freshly killed sheep was cut to fit and bound to his sore back. Then Finn gave him a drink of water from his cupped hands and restored his strength to him. The sheepskin grew fast and could never be removed, so Conan always had to wear it.

With all Conan's cowardice, he really did come out victorious in one battle. But when you hear of this particular combat, you will understand why the Fenians, instead of honoring him for it, had less respect for him than ever.

During the progress of one battle, when a hostile army had landed on the shores of Erin, one champion stood out in front each morning and demanded single combat.

"If you are not afraid of me," he would call, "why don't you send a man to meet me?"

56

He was not a great hero and the Fenians refused to be bothered with him alone. Finally, when they grew tired of hearing the challenge, as a joke they sent Conan out to fight with him. A roar of laughter came from the Fenians as Conan went cautiously out to meet this man. The enemy gave a cry of rage at the insult, and the champion called out angrily:

"What do you mean by sending a clown to meet me? Is there not a man among you who dares to face me?"

Conan came forward slowly, afraid for his life. When he got close to the champion, the latter said sarcastically:

"The Fenians seem anxious that I be left unharmed, since they send me such a dangerous foe."

"You are in more danger from the man behind you, than from the one in front of you," said the cowardly Conan.

The champion looked around to see what he meant. At that moment Conan swung his sword and cut off the man's head.

This treacherous way of winning a combat angered Finn and the Fenians beyond all measure. They considered that Conan had disgraced them. It is a wonder they did not put him to death. His only punishment was banishment from the band for a short time. We find him in the later stories, just as full of trickery, just as cowardly and just as uncomplimentary to his companions, but still the butt of all their jokes.

57



One of the most splendid heroes of the Fenians was Dermot. His name is second only to that of Finn in the stories of valiant deeds. He was younger than his chief by many years, even younger than Ossian, Finn's son. Dermot was the fleetest man of them all, and also the one with the keenest eyes. In many of the stories he is chosen for deeds of valor rather than Finn himself. This happens, however, when Finn is an old man, and his wisdom and leadership are of more value than his strength.

This young hero was the son of a god. In those days, however, gods could be wounded and could die. They lived on earth and needed food to live on, just the same as other men. The distinction between the Irish gods and heroes like Finn is very slight in the old stories. Dermot did have one gift no other Fenian possessed. His foster-father, the god Angus, had granted him a body that no weapon could wound. There was but one thing that could harm him. That was the tusks of a wild boar. His foster-father warned him never to hunt the boar unless it was absolutely necessary, and then to exercise every care so as not to be wounded by the tusks.

Dermot was a handsome man, with curling fair hair and blue eyes like those of his leader. He was Finn's closest companion and greatly loved by him. His was the soul of honor. If he got into trouble it was from doing some task his honor demanded. His courage and strength were unquestioned. The Fenians always fought with more bravery if they knew Dermot was with them.

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Such a handsome man could not help being very popular with the maidens of Erin. They liked him because of his strength and his handsome face. But it was the Love Spot on his forehead which made it impossible for any girl to look at him and not fall in love with him. You shall have to hear how he received this gift.

One day he was out hunting with Conan, Oscar and Gaul of Morna. As often happened in those days, the chase led them far from their camp. With the coming of darkness they began to look for a shelter for the night. They wandered around until they came upon a little house in the forest. When they knocked, a gray-haired man came to the door and inquired their errand.

"We ask for thy hospitality," said Dermot.

"That you shall have," declared the old man, throwing wide the door. "Come right in, and thousand welcomes to you."

Inside they found a queer household waiting for them. At the table sat a beautiful young girl; before the fire was a large gray cat; while lying at one side of the fireplace was a big sheep with a fleece of long, shaggy wool.

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The old man went into the kitchen of the house and prepared a splendid meal, which he placed before the heroes. All ate heartily, but, as usual, Conan was still eating after all the others had finished.

He was interrupted by the sheep, which climbed to the table and commenced eating of the food that was left. Conan pushed the animal's nose out of the food time and time again and tried to go on with his eating. It was of no use. Before he could get a bite, the old sheep would thrust its nose into the plate.

"I call it a strange house where a sheep is allowed to eat from the table," declared Conan.

"I did not put him there," answered the old man. "If you do not like his company, put him off."

Conan grasped the sheep in his two arms, intending to lift it from the table. To his surprise he could not move it. He tugged and strained without avail. At last the sheep, with a quick toss of his head, threw Conan into the center of the room.

How the other men roared with laughter! It was always amusing to see Conan get the worst of anything. As for Conan, he picked himself up sulkily.

"You laugh loudly," he growled. "I'll wager there is not one of you who can move it."

The idea was ridiculous. To think of anyone claiming to be a hero and unable to lift an ordinary sheep! Oscar, with a laugh, started to brush the animal away with one hand. Soon he had the sheep in both arms and was tugging and straining in an attempt to move it. Then he, too, found himself thrown lightly away from the table.

61

Now it ceased to be a joke. Dermot tried to remove the animal with no better success. Gaul, it is true, got the sheep off the table for a moment, but the animal soon turned this hero on his back and stood upon him. Then it jumped back to the table.

During all this time the old man had been looking on in amusement. Now he spoke to the cat, which was lazily basking itself before the fire.

"Take him away," ordered the old man.

The cat got up slowly and climbed to the table. Then, taking the sheep by the long hair of its throat, the cat led it down and out of the room.

The four heroes looked at one another in surprise and astonishment. Dermot picked up his shield and his weapons. "Come," he said to his companions. "We shall not stay under a roof where a host makes game of his guests."

"Sit down," said the old man. "You have been testing your strength in an impossible feat. You will not feel badly over your failure when I tell you that the sheep you tried to move was the World,

itself. To lift it is a task no man can accomplish. The cat could master the animal easily, because the cat was Old Age, and even the world cannot withstand its force. Come, let me show you to your beds."

The heroes were somewhat soothed by the explanations and followed the host into another room, where they found their beds prepared for them. Later, the young girl came to the door and looked from one to the other of the men.

"I have a gift," she said. "It goes to but one of you."

"Let me have it," said Conan. "If ever a man needed a gift, it is I."

"Give it to me," said Oscar. "I am the strongest."

Gaul and Dermot said nothing. These men were wise. They knew that they were in an enchanted house, and that the girl would give the gift to whom she chose.

"Not to you, or you, or you," she said pointing in turn to Conan, Oscar and Gaul. "My gift cannot go to any of you. I am Youth and youth has left you all."

She approached the couch of Dermot. "You can never grow old," she said, "so I shall always be with you. To you I shall give the gift that Youth can bestow."

She raised her wand and touched him lightly on the forehead.

"I give to you the Love Spot, Dermot," she said. "Who wears it will win the love of all women. No maiden will be able to look upon you without loving you. Treat my gift with honor and with wisdom."

Then the maiden left the room, and the heroes went to sleep.

That is the way in which Dermot received the Love Spot. It made him beloved by all women, but in the end, this gift caused him great sorrow. You shall see in the story of "Dermot and Grainne" that the gifts of the fairies do not always bring happiness.

Finn's dearest friend and constant companion, during his later years, was Dermot. This young man was most loyal to his chief, and because he was such a true friend, so strong in the fight, so swift of foot and so keen of sight, Finn depended greatly upon him. Where Finn went you were sure to find Dermot, and if Dermot was off on an adventure, Finn was pretty sure to be with him.

On the day of our story the two were out hunting with some friends. We find these Fenians on the hunt a great deal of the time. The reason is a simple one. From November to May the men of the army lived at the expense of the High King and the people; from May to November they had to get their food and clothing by hunting. Naturally, many of the adventures start on a hunting trip.

As this particular morning advanced, the party decided to stop in a little sheltered spot near the shore for their meal. It was while the men were getting the game cooked that Finn and Dermot strolled along the beach and sat down on a ledge of rock. While they were there a ship sailed into the little harbor.

It was a small vessel, handsome in every line, with sails full as if in a strong breeze. This was remarkable because no air was stirring at that time. The ship neared the shore and stopped. The sails dropped loosely. Finn and Dermot looked in vain for the crew, but there was no one visible except a lone woman, who sat on the deck.

"It is a wonder to me that one woman should be able to sail a ship alone and come into a harbor at full speed with no wind blowing," said Finn.

Dermot was looking with interest toward the ship.

"You shall not wonder long," said Dermot. "I will go down and bring you word."

Finn detained him with a laugh. "No, Dermot," he said. "This time we will take into consideration the heart of the lady. I shall see for myself."

Finn went down to the shore, placed the point of his sword upon a rock and sprang lightly to the deck of the vessel.

He was amazed at the beauty of it all. The deck was as clean as a deck could be with trimmings of silver and gold. At the end, on a seat of the finest tapestry, sat a beautiful woman. She smiled engagingly and held out her hand toward Finn.

"Come here," she said. "I wish you would tell me where I have landed."

"You are in the harbor of Erin," said Finn.

"And could you tell me where I am to find the home of a man named Finn MacCool?" she asked.

"You will not need to find his home, for I am Finn himself," he answered.

"Then I am indeed lucky," said the woman. "I have come to play a game with Finn. I have heard that he never refuses to play for a sentence, and that he honorably lives up to his agreements."

It flattered Finn to be praised by a beautiful woman. Like most of the heroes of history his wisdom deserted him when dealing with a woman. It was true that he and the other Fenians took great delight in playing a game for a wager. These wagers were usually in the form of sentences. That is, they would play a game and at the end the winner would set a task for the loser to perform. Sometimes these tasks required years of labor and much suffering, but no Fenian ever refused to carry out a sentence imposed upon him.

"I would willingly play if I had my board and chessmen," said Finn.

"I have them as good as your own," answered the woman. To prove it she pulled out a beautiful board and a set of silver and gold chessmen. She had Finn sit on the seat near her to play. At the end of the first game Finn was the winner.

"You have beaten me," she said with a dazzling smile. "What is the sentence you are to pronounce?"

Now Finn had not quite made up his mind as to what manner of woman it was who was playing with him. She looked and dressed like a king's daughter, but an enchantress could assume that appearance. To prove it he made a sentence that would prove very difficult for anyone not able to use the arts of magic.

"I put you under bonds," he said, "not to eat twice in the same place or sleep twice in the same bed until you have brought me a white horse with a saddle and bridle of red leather for myself and each of the Fenians with me today."

The woman smiled again. "Look behind you," she said.

Finn looked toward the shore. There were the beautiful steeds he had ordered, handsome in their saddles and bridles of red leather. In the lead was one much finer than the others.

Finn knew then that he was playing with an enchantress. He wished he was well out of his bargain, but he could not refuse to play the second game without violating the honor of a Fenian. He felt sure that the woman would win the next game.

The second game was short. As Finn imagined, the woman, by the aid of her powers, proved an easy winner. He was anxious to know what was in store for him.

"Let me know my sentence at once," he demanded.

"Perhaps you will be sorry for your impatience when you hear it," said the lady.

"No trouble was ever made lighter by putting it off," declared Finn. "Pronounce your sentence immediately."

"Very well," she answered. "I put you under bonds to go with me and obey me in what I ask until some one throws upon you the amount of seven shovelfuls of earth. You will be under my enchantment until that happens."

Finn did not show his dismay when he heard this hard sentence.

"It is your right to demand it," he said. "Wait here until I give the steeds to my men and leave orders for them to follow during my absence."

When he turned to look for the horses they had vanished. She saw his look of astonishment.

"You put me under bonds to bring the steeds, but I was not obliged to leave them there," said the enchantress.

"It is true," said Finn. "Now, since you have taken advantage of the wording of my sentence, I shall try to evade yours. You have put me under bonds to go with you, but you did not mention that I was not to try to escape from them."

She nodded. "Of course, as a man of honor you cannot tell anyone what will release you," she said. "If you free yourself otherwise, I shall be to blame."

Finn went ashore to tell his men of his wager and sentence. He gave orders as to the conduct of the Fenians during his absence, then took Dermot to the top of a hill near the shore.

"Your eyes and ears are best in all Erin," said Finn. "You will remain here to watch and listen. If you hear my horn, it will mean that I am not able to release myself by my own efforts."

"I will not leave until you are back or my body turns to dust and the wind carries it away," declared Dermot.

Then Finn went down to the ship and sprang aboard. The watchers saw the sails fill and the boat move swiftly out of sight over the waves.

## II.

It was not long before the vessel arrived in a small harbor, which Finn recognized as the port of the White Nation. This was not very encouraging to him, because in a battle not long before he had defeated the king of that nation. He began to suspect that he was under enchantment for some purpose. Still he must go with the woman because he had pledged his word.

When the ship stopped the woman got out and bade him follow her. On the shore she paused, and pointing to a broad road bordered with tall trees, said,

"As you are a great champion in your country it is not fitting for you to follow me into the city as a servant. You will walk up the road to the palace while I take a shorter one and prepare a welcome for you."

Finn did as he was told. He was puzzled and anxious. He could not but feel that there was something wrong with this plan. The woman had put him under bonds to come as a servant, and now she made it appear that this was not what she wished. Finn wished that he had been able to keep his sword, but that the woman would not allow. Only one thought cheered him. Dermot was watching and listening, ready to come to his assistance at any time.

Soon he came to the gates of the palace. A great crowd of people rushed out as though to welcome him. The welcome was a deceit. The men pushed against him on all sides and shoved him from one to another until he was bruised and bleeding. Finn was the match for many ordinary men in strength. Still, without his swords, he could not stand off a multitude.

Thus pushing and jostling him the crowd bore him into the courtyard into the presence of the ruler of the nation. The king sat upon a raised platform and by his side, in the robes of a princess, was the woman who had brought Finn to the country under sentence.

When the king saw Finn he laughed long and loudly.

"What ho, Finn MacCool!" roared he. "Methinks this is a fine manner for the arrival of a champion of Erin."

Finn hung his head in shame.

"My daughter asked me to name the thing I most desired in all the world," went on the king. "I told her the one thing necessary to my happiness was the head of Finn MacCool. She promised to bring you here that I might take it myself."

Finn's heart sank. He felt that the hour of his death was very near. The king stepped down from his platform, sword in hand, and swung the weapon back and forth.

"You would not dare do that if you would let me have a sword," said Finn, looking him squarely in the eye.

The king drew back and bowed his head in thought. Probably he had hoped to have Finn beg for his life.

"No," he said at length, "I will let you think over the fact that you are in my power. It will be pleasant for you to lie and wonder how long I will let you live."

He gave orders that Finn's legs and arms be firmly tied with seven knots on each rope so that escape would be impossible. Then he had his captive placed in a dark dungeon. Each day he was to receive an ounce of bread and a pint of water, no more under any consideration. For a big strong man like Finn this was very little food. But being tied and lying in a black hole was even more likely to take the spirit out of him.

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Each day an old woman came with his food and water, but his arms and legs were never loosened. On the eighth day Finn said to the woman,

"Tell the king that I beg leave to walk in the garden for an hour. I do not ask for my head, but if he does not give me a little freedom I shall not be able to live. For the king to take the head of a dead man would be small glory."

The king yielded to this request and ordered Finn an hour of freedom. He took no chances, however. The walk was to occur in a walled garden and thirty armed men were to be with him every moment.

Finn was happy over the privilege. It was not the fear of death that had made him ask for the walk. No, he had a far better reason, as you shall see. After he had walked a few minutes he said,

"I am very fond of music. Have you any musical instruments with you?"

Now the chief was very sorry to see such a mighty man a prisoner without a chance for his life. He would gladly have had the music played, but was obliged to confess that none of his men had instruments with them at the time.

Then Finn took from under his clothes a queerly shaped horn. He turned it over and over in his hands and looked at it as though it was very dear to him. Finally he spoke.

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"When I was at home and in charge of my men I used to play for them quite often. I really enjoy music very much. I wonder—perhaps you and your men might like to hear a tune?" he finished, as though the idea had just come to him.

"I should be very glad to hear you play," answered the chief.

So Finn placed the horn to his lips and played a tune of the Fenians. At the end of the air he blew a blast that echoed from hill to hill and made the listeners involuntarily put their hands to their ears. Then Finn put the horn away and was willing to be tied up again. The chief thought he had heard some wild Irish music. He little dreamed that the call had gone out for help.

### III.

Dermot was asleep when Finn sounded the horn but the last note of it waked him. He sprang to his feet with a mighty bound that sent showers of rocks and dirt in every direction.

"Great is the trouble of my chief!" he exclaimed. "I have never heard such a blast from his horn."

He rushed to the shore, found a small boat lying there, hoisted the sail and set off in the direction from whence the sound had come. He was lucky enough to arrive at the same harbor in which was anchored the ship on which Finn had been taken away. Dermot anchored his boat and started up the broad road.

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As he went along he found men, women and children hastening in the same direction with all the speed at their command. He asked several of them the reason for their hurry, but all seemed too excited to answer him. Finally Dermot grew angry, so singling out one man who seemed to be in greater haste than the rest, he picked him up and held him off the ground while he repeated his question.

The man was greatly frightened, you may believe, for Dermot was taller and broader than any man of the White Nation and must have seemed quite like a giant to his captive. The man suddenly became very anxious to explain.

"You must not belong to this country, if you do not know where we are going," he said.

"I am not from this country," answered Dermot. "I am from Erin."

"If that is so, you must know Finn MacCool," said the man.

"I know him well. He is my chief," replied Dermot.

"Then you had better tell no one that you are from Erin," said the man. "If you do, you are likely to share the same fate. Finn is to be hanged in the palace courtyard today. The gallows is ready. When he is dead, his body is to be pulled to pieces by wild horses. You had better not acknowledge that you know him."

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Dermot set the fellow on his feet again. The fierce look in his eyes caused the man to step back.

"If you were not so small," thundered Dermot, "you would never give such advice to another man. Men from Erin never fail to acknowledge their friends. Show me the way to the palace."

"If you will go up the hill on your right, you can see it in the valley below," directed the man. He lost no time in getting a safe distance from this mighty stranger. He was so frightened that instead of going on to the hanging, he turned around and made for his home as fast as he could. In the whole White Nation he was the only man traveling away from the palace.

Dermot bounded up the hill with mighty strides. When on top he looked in the direction of the hurrying people. Sure enough, there was the castle with crowds spread out all around it. Dermot

dashed down the hill at full speed.

People were crowded so closely together that no ordinary man could possibly have squeezed through them. Each man was elbowing his neighbor so that he might get close enough to see the death of this great Fenian chief. Dermot could have cut his way through with his sword, but it was one of the rules of the Fenians not to harm the common people of a nation. He cleared his way by taking several in his right hand and several in his left and putting them behind him. Then he stepped into the opening and repeated the process until he reached the courtyard. He walked past the gallows and up to the pole of combat before the palace. This he struck a mighty blow with his sword.

The king came to his window and looked out in alarm.

"Who struck that blow?" he asked. "It must have been an enemy."

If the trouble had not been so serious, Dermot might have laughed at this silly remark. But he was in no humor for laughter.

"If that sounded like the blow of a friend," he said, "listen to this."

Once more he swung his sword against the pole. This time his blow was so strong that the pole broke into splinters, which showered over the heads of the people.

"What do you want?" whined the king, who was, and always had been, a fearful coward.

"I want to see my chief, Finn MacCool, or to fight for him," announced Dermot.

"See him you shall not," declared the king, keeping well in the protection of his castle. "You are at liberty to fight for him."

"Very well," answered Dermot. "Send out seven hundred of your best men on my right hand, seven hundred on my left, seven hundred at my back and as many as you wish in front of me."

"How many?" demanded the startled king, drawing still further back into his palace.

Dermot repeated his demand. You must remember that Dermot was the son of a god and could not be wounded. It is no wonder the king thought he had misunderstood. It was too good a chance to let go by. The king sent out the men requested, feeling sure that he would soon be rid of this fellow, who had made splinters of the combat pole.

But the king's men were no match for Dermot even when they pressed against him in such numbers. By nightfall not a man had touched him while hundreds of the warriors of the White Nation were wounded or dead. With the setting of the sun, Dermot put up his sword and called out to the king,

"Do I get shelter for the night?"

It was customary in those days to stop fighting when the sun went down. It was also the custom to furnish food and a bed to a hero who was making a trial at arms. The king pointed to a long, low house a short distance from the courtyard.

"Go in there," he called. "You are welcome to what shelter you find."

#### IV.

Dermot was tired from his combat. He went to the house, opened the door and walked in. To his surprise he found himself surrounded by hundreds of little men, reaching no higher than his knee. They were wild, shaggy little fellows, kept by the king to kill people he did not like. Though not strong singly, they were there in such numbers that they could cover a man like ants and crush the life out of him.

When Dermot had entered, the little men shut the door and barred it. Then they began covering the windows and filling up the chinks between the logs.

"Why are you going to such trouble?" asked Dermot. The antics of the little fellows amused him. He never thought of treachery on the part of the king.

"We fear you may escape," answered one of the men. "It is our duty to eat you."

Poor foolish little fellows! They imagined a mighty hero like Dermot could creep through a hole large enough to let one of them through.

Dermot's amusement turned to anger. By all the laws of hospitality he was entitled to a place to rest quietly until time for the next day's combat. The king would have lasted only a few minutes if Dermot could have laid a hand on him when he discovered the foul scheme. The little men rushed at him by the hundreds. There was little use of using a sword against such small enemies. Dermot caught up the nearest by the ankles and used him as a club to beat down the others.

Soon there were no little savages left except one very small fellow in the corner.

"Spare me, great champion," he called in a shrill, high voice. "If you give me my life there is not a place to which you will go but I will be with you. I will be a good servant to you."

"No man ever asked for his life but I granted it," said Dermot.

He sat down on a bench and looked about him. "Have you any food?" he asked.

"Nothing," said the small chief, for he was the leader of the small men. "We never have food except

the people the king sends us to eat. If you will go out and walk forty paces to your right, you will come to the king's bakery. There you should be able to get some loaves."

Dermot followed directions and found the king's baker just closing up for the night.

"Give me two loaves of bread," demanded Dermot.

The baker let out a scream of rage. "Ruffian," he yelled. "Do you dare ask me for bread after the way you treated our soldiers today? Get out of here this minute."

The little man was dancing with rage. Dermot let out a roar of laughter. He picked up the baker and held him at arms' length. "You are a nimble dancer," he said. "I shall give you a place to dance."

Opening the oven, now cool enough so that it would not injure him, Dermot put the baker inside and shut the door. He helped himself to what bread he wanted while the baker kept up an excited dancing, accompanied by a steady pounding on the oven door.

But Dermot was not content to live on bread alone. He asked the small chief where he might get some meat.

"Instead of turning to the right, as you did when you went to the bakery, turn to the left and go the same distance in that direction. That will bring you to the king's butcher, where you should be able to get plenty of meat."

Dermot did as he was advised and found the man in his shop. He was a big, red-faced fellow, smeared from head to foot with the blood of the last animal he had killed.

"I want some meat for my supper," said Dermot.

The butcher flew into a fine rage and brandished his knife. "Get out of here, you ruffian from Erin!" he shouted. "It was you who wounded so many of our people today. Get away before I cut out your heart."

The butcher made a dash at Dermot. The latter was merely amused by the rage of the man. He laughed loudly, took away the knife with one hand, while with the other he caught the butcher by the belt and lifted him off the floor. A meat hook on the wall was very handy. Dermot hooked the belt of the butcher over that and left him hanging there, a funny sight as he kicked and yelled. With the meat Dermot got from the shop, and the bread, he and the small chief had a hearty supper.

The next day he again presented himself before the king.

"What do you want today?" asked the ruler of the White Nation.

"I want to see my chief, Finn MacCool, or to fight for him," said Dermot.

"Fight you shall," declared the king. "You shall not see him."

Then the king ordered sent out double the number of men that had faced the champion the day before. He still had hopes that he could overpower Dermot by numbers. But this battle was but a second like the one of the day before. Dermot could not be wounded, while the slaughter of the king's soldiers was something terrible. With the setting of the sun the combat was over, and Dermot went back to the long house to eat the supper the small chief had prepared for him, and to rest after his hard day.

## V.

Next morning Dermot went again to the palace and made the same demand as on the two previous days. This time the king did not send out his forces to battle. Even he could see that he was wasting his soldiers without hope of defeating this new champion. Still he did not wish to give up Finn MacCool. His soldiers were not strong enough, the small men could not eat this man, but the king had other schemes to try before he gave up. Everyone knew the fondness of the Fenians for attempting feats of strength or adventure. The king decided to try that on Dermot, so that he could gain time, even if he did not get rid of this nuisance.

In the land of the White Nation there lived an enormous fellow known as the Red Giant. His choicest possession was a beautiful hound, which he kept near him at all times. When he went out walking, he had the dog with him on the end of a chain of solid gold. When he was at home he fastened the chain to the wall and kept the dog beside him.

There was a strange thing about this Red Giant. He had only one eye and that was in one side of his head, just above his ear. Because of this, he could see only what happened on one side of him. He kept the hound to warn him if anyone approached on the other side.

Though this man was the strongest person in the White Nation, he had no use for the king and would not serve him. The monarch resolved to get his aid by trickery.

"I will not let you see Finn MacCool," he told Dermot, "until you have brought to this courtyard the hound and the golden chain."

"Where can I find it?" asked Dermot.

"The world is wide," answered the king. "Finding it is part of the task."

"No man can give me a task I will not try to accomplish," said Dermot. "There is but one thing I demand. If I go after this hound, you must pledge yourself that Finn is to be taken out of the dungeon and given a better room, with plenty of food to eat."

This request did not please the king. He did not wish to grant Finn any favors, but he was afraid Dermot would not go to the Red Giant if he did not agree. He gave a grudging consent.

Poor Dermot! He went to the long house in despair. How was he to bring back something when he did not know where to look for it, and when there was no one in the country to give him directions? Yet, if he did not complete the task, he would lose his head and Finn would have to die. He sat down in the long house and buried his face in his hands.

"What is troubling you, master?" asked the small chief.

Dermot sighed. "Nothing that you can help me with," he said.

"I'll wager that you have been sent to bring the hound and the golden chain," said the chief.

Dermot sat up in surprise. "How did you know that?" he demanded.

"Because the hound is kept by the Red Giant, and the king has rid himself of many a good man by sending him after that hound," said the little fellow.

"Do you know where I can find him?" asked Dermot.

"I can lead you to the place and show you how to get the hound," declared the chief.

The two set out immediately and traveled all day through a heavy forest. In the evening they came to the gate of an immense stone castle. There the chief stopped Dermot.

"In there lives the Red Giant," he said. "At this hour he has had his meal and is sleeping beside the table in the center of the castle."

Then the chief went on to explain that the giant had but one eye, which faced the main door to see if anyone entered. He took from his pocket a little cake and passed it to Dermot.

"Take this cake," he said. "Do not go in at the main door but follow the corridor around and come to the small opening at the other side of the room. Throw this cake to the dog, and when he has eaten it pick him up and bring him with you. If you are quiet the giant will never know you have been in there."

Dermot thanked his helper and went into the castle. Everything happened just as the small chief had promised. The task was so easy that he was back in five minutes with the hound under his arm. The two set off for the palace with their prize.

But Dermot was not happy. He kept going slowly and more slowly, until finally he stopped all together.

"What is the matter?" asked the chief.

"I can't help thinking of the dirty trick I played on the Red Giant," answered Dermot.

"How is that?"

"Like a thief I took away his hound without giving him a chance to fight for it," said Dermot.

"It was the hound you went for, not a contest, and bringing him back will give you sight of Finn MacCool," argued the chief. "Let us hurry."

But Dermot would not go. "I'd think a man a fine champion if he sneaked in and took something of mine," he said. "Not even for Finn will I do such a thing. I am going back and take the hound away from the giant as a champion should."

No argument of the small chief did any good. Back they went to the castle and again the small chief stayed outside.

"Since you are bent on being foolish, I will give you some more advice," said the little fellow. "The giant is strongest on his stone floor. Much of his strength leaves him when he is on soft earth."

"I thank you for your help," said Dermot.

He slipped in quietly and fastened the hound to the wall. Then he went around to the main door and stepped into the room. Instantly the giant saw him and sprang to his feet.

"What do you want?" he roared.

"Your hound and your golden chain," answered Dermot.

"Well, you'll not get him from me," roared the giant. He made a rush at Dermot and grappled with him.

Now the Red Giant was a big man in the White Nation, but you must remember that Dermot was a big man, too. It turned out that they were about equal in strength. At the first rush of the giant, both men went down on the floor where they struggled desperately. Back and forth they rolled, with Dermot putting every bit of his strength into the effort to get them out on the ground. Finally, with a mighty heave, he succeeded in causing them both to roll out of the castle door.

As soon as they struck the soft earth Dermot was the stronger. He picked up the Red Giant and drove him into the earth like a post, until only his head was above ground.

"Spare me, man of Erin," pleaded the Red Giant. "I concede that you are the better man, and that you are entitled to the hound."

Dermot never took advantage of a man who asked for mercy. He pulled the giant out of the earth and set him upon his feet. From that moment the Red Giant was his friend. He invited Dermot and the small chief into the castle and set out food and drink for them. In the morning he willingly gave up the hound and bade them a hearty farewell.



## VI.

Dermot went before the king the next morning. You can guess that the monarch was far from overjoyed at seeing him. He had felt sure that the troublesome champion would never bother him again.

"Well, have you the hound with the golden chain?" he asked, trying to hide his disappointment.

"You see them before you," answered Dermot.

"Hand them over to me," demanded the king.

That was just what Dermot had no intention of doing. He felt sorry for the Red Giant, because the man had put up a good fight and had been his friend after the struggle was over. Moreover, he felt that the king had no right to the hound.

"That I will not do," declared Dermot.

The king's wicked little eyes lit up with pleasure. "Then, by the terms of the trial, you forfeit your head," he said.

"You are wrong," said Dermot. "The words of the trial were, 'until you have brought to the courtyard the hound with the golden chain.' I have carried out the command of the trial; now I am going to take the hound back to the Red Giant, who has more right and more need of him than any of us."

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The king knew he was caught by the terms of his own sentence. He pounded the arms of his throne in anger, but he did not dare deny the terms he had pronounced.

"Well," demanded Dermot, "do I get to see my chief, Finn MacCool?"

"You do not," answered the king. "I did not say that bringing the hound was the only trial you would have to accomplish. You shall not see your chief until you bring me the true story of the Sorrowful Knight."

Dermot was willing to try another test. He believed that the king was honest in saying he meant to have two trials before releasing Finn.

"Where can I find this man?" he asked.

"That is for you to find out," said the king.

Dermot left the palace and went to the long house. Once more he felt discouraged, but once more the small chief came to his aid.

"I'll wager you have been sent to get the story of the Sorrowful Knight," he said.

"How did you guess it?" asked Dermot.

"Because that is the most dangerous task the king could possibly think of. The quest will lead you into the land of enchantment. No one has ever heard the story, and few have ever reached the castle."

"Nevertheless I must go," said Dermot. "All I need is some one to show me the way."

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"I can do that easily," answered the little fellow.

Dermot looked at him in admiration. "I shall never cease to be thankful that I spared your life," he said. "We shall start immediately, and on the way we shall leave with the Red Giant his hound and golden chain."

## VII.

The Red Giant greeted them warmly. Never before had he met a man who was stronger than he, so that made him respect Dermot; but he respected him still more for his honesty, when he found that the hound was to be returned to him.

"Are you on another quest, or have you rescued your chief?" asked the giant.

"I am on a most difficult errand," explained Dermot. "I must get the story of the Sorrowful Knight before I may see Finn MacCool."

The Red Giant slapped his knee a resounding whack.

"You are right," he said. "It is difficult! It would be impossible but for the fact that you have been fair with me. I once did a service for the Sorrowful Knight. He swore that nothing I should ever ask him would be refused. Tomorrow I shall go with you, and my request shall be in your interest."

You may be sure that Dermot was glad he had not taken a thief's advantage of the giant when he had had the opportunity. That night, with the small chief, he and the Red Giant spent the time eating, drinking and telling stories.

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The journey to the land of the Sorrowful Knight, under the guidance of the Red Giant, was a short one. They found the castle set deep in a thick wood. No sound came from it. The branches of the trees drooped in sadness. Even the cattle grazing in the field seemed to crop the grass mournfully.

The guard at the gate wiped the tears from his eyes before he asked them the nature of their

errand. When he learned that they wished to see the Sorrowful Knight, he led them through a quiet courtyard into a dark and dismal chamber in the heart of the castle.

At first Dermot could see nothing. When his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he saw that the room was draped in black, and that the furniture was the color of night. At the table in the center of the room sat a man, his head leaning on his hand, his elbow on the table. He appeared to be asleep, nor did he awaken when the three entered the room. He must have been at the table a long time. Where his elbow rested upon it, a deep groove had been worn, and into it, even in his sleep, the tears dropped steadily.

The Red Giant took him by the shoulder and spoke to him. The man straightened up slowly.

"Why do you come here to interrupt my grieving?" he asked.

"You promised many years ago that you would grant any request I would make," said the Red Giant. "I have come to test your promise."

The Sorrowful Knight sighed heavily. "What is your request?" he asked.

"You are to tell to Dermot of the Fenians the reason for your sorrow," said the giant.

Once more the knight sighed, and the tears flowed more freely down his cheeks.

"I feared your request would be that," he said. "Since I promised you on my honor, I must tell the story, but no other living man has heard it."

The Sorrowful Knight had dinner served for his guests with a flickering candle for light. Most people would have had a small appetite in such gloomy surroundings, but Dermot and his friends were hungry enough to forget about it. They did full justice to the meal. When each had satisfied his hunger the knight began:

"It was twenty-one years ago that the sorrow came to me. I lived in this castle as happily as any man of the kingdom. Anyone would have been proud of the twelve handsome young men I called my sons. Every place I went my boys were with me.

"On the morning of the first of May it was our custom to hunt the deer together. Of course, we hunted on many days of the spring, but the May day was always our first deer hunt. On the morning of which I speak we started up a deer without horns and gave chase.

"It was a fleeter animal than any we had ever followed before. All day long we kept after her until toward evening we saw her disappear into a cave. We thought we had her trapped and followed swiftly. Imagine our surprise when we found ourselves not in a cave at all, but in a new country, at the gate of a large castle.

"The deer was nowhere in sight. We were too far from home to return that night, so we decided to ask for shelter from the lord of the castle. This was readily granted.

"We were taken into a big banquet hall. Along one side of the room, over huge fires, were twelve kettles of scalding water. In front of each kettle was the carcass of a wild boar. The master of the castle apologized for not having supper cooked and asked if any of us could prepare the boars for roasting. We said we could and set to work.

"But, though we dipped the animals in the scalding water, we could not remove a single bristle. The scalding seemed to make them stick more tightly. We could do nothing toward preparing the meat for supper.

"Then the master called in a small servant and told him to get the animals ready. This man lined up the twelve boars, blew upon them through a small tube, and instantly every bristle disappeared. I knew then that we were in the land of enchantment.

"We had all that we could eat, and after the meal the lord of the castle asked me if my sons would be willing to show their strength for our amusement. I told him they would. He ordered in twelve small men with a long chain and bade my sons pull it away from them. This seemed like an easy task. But when my sons took hold of the chain they could not move the small men an inch. Soon the small men pulled my sons toward them with a quick jerk and threw the slackened part about the necks of my boys. The instant the chain touched my sons they became twelve stones."

At this point the tears of the Sorrowful Knight stopped his words. His listeners had to wait until he had mastered his grief before he could go on.

"When I saw my twelve noble sons thus changed before my eyes, I was filled with the great grief which has never left me. The lord of the castle had me thrown out into the night, and it was with difficulty that I found my way back to my home. Since then I never have left my castle.

"Each year, on May day, the deer comes to the gate and calls, 'Here is the deer, but where are the hunters to follow it?' Tomorrow she will come again, but no one here has heart for the chase.

"That, then, is my story. I ask you if any man could be happy with such a sorrow in his life?"

Dermot had listened with rising pity that soon turned into anger. He rose abruptly to his feet.

"I have but been sent to get your story, but no true Fenian is willing to let wickedness go unpunished. If you will go with me, there will be men to follow the deer tomorrow, and the sun shall not set before I have tried my strength against the enchantment of the lord of that castle."

For the first time in twenty-one years the Sorrowful Knight no longer wept. He announced that he would go the next morning. The small chief and the Red Giant also promised to take part in the chase of the deer.

In the morning the deer came to the gate and called as was her custom, "Here is the deer, but where are the hunters to follow it?"

The four men had been waiting and now they set after her at full speed. All day long they followed her, and in the evening she approached a cave in the hillside.

"That is where she will disappear!" shouted the knight.

Dermot sped after her. Now, as you know, there was no one in Erin who could equal him in a race. He rapidly caught up with the deer and seized her by the hind leg, just as she reached the mouth of the cave. Instantly the deer disappeared, and in her place was a hideous old witch, with straggly gray hair and long crooked teeth. Dermot was so startled that he let go his hold. The witch ran screaming into the cave.

95

The men followed and came out at the gate of the castle just as the knight had done years before. When they knocked for admission, they were met by the master, who seemed greatly surprised to see the Sorrowful Knight.

"I thought you had enough of this place when you were here before," he said.

Dermot did the answering. "He comes with me," he said. "I could not have enough of your castle, because this is the first time I have ever been here."

The master invited them into the room where waited the twelve kettles of water and the twelve boars.

"Have you a man among you who can prepare the supper?" asked the master.

"We have," said Dermot. "And it is a long time since you had one as good. We have also a man who will get the meat."

Dermot went out into the forest and brought in enough meat for the meal. He knew better than to try to prepare the enchanted boars. The ones he had killed, he dressed with his sword and soon had them cooked. The master made no comments, but ate with the others.

96

When the meal was over the lord of the castle addressed the knight.

"Have you a man among you who can show us a little action for our amusement?"

Once more Dermot did the answering. "He has. Send in the same twelve small men you used against his sons and we will show you enough action to satisfy you."

The small men brought in the chain and passed one end to Dermot, who braced his feet against the rocks on the floor. The small men pulled as hard as they could, but not a link of slack chain could they get. All at once Dermot jerked them toward him, looped the chain over their necks and snapped off the twelve heads.

He then held out the end of the chain to the master and said, "Perhaps you would like to show us a little action yourself?"

The lord of the castle was seized with a fit of trembling at the thought of pulling against this terrible Fenian. He dropped to his knees and began to beg for his life.

"Spare me, and I will bring back the knight's twelve sons," he cried.

"That is all I could ask of you," said Dermot.

The frightened enchanter took his rod and touched each of the twelve blocks of stone along the wall. Instantly the twelve sons of the knight were with them, as strong and hearty as ever.

97

You can imagine how the father felt over this change. He was no longer the Sorrowful Knight.

They wasted no time in leaving the enchanter's palace and in returning to the castle of the man who was now the Glad Knight. From there Dermot and his friends went on to the home of the Red Giant, and then on to the king of the White Nation. Dermot was happy in being able to rescue the twelve young men, but he was far happier in the thought that he was now to see Finn MacCool.

## IX.

On his return Dermot presented himself at the palace. Though the wicked old king was surprised to see him again, he endeavored not to show it.

"Well, have you the story of the Sorrowful Knight?" he asked.

"I have," said Dermot. "Are you ready to hear it?"

Then he told the king the story, just as it had been told to him. I don't believe that he mentioned the rescue of the twelve sons, because that was not in his sentence, and he was anxious to be through with the task and rescue Finn. At the end of the story he said:

"Now I have done what you asked. Do I get to see my chief?"

98

"You do not," answered the king. "You shall not see him until you get me the story of the Lad of True Tales."

Dermot's anger flamed up. For the first time he saw that the king was not honest in his sentences, and that he was merely setting tasks to put him off, until he could find something that would do away with him forever.

"Oh, is that so?" he asked. "You should have spoken about it sooner. I have worn out all the leather

I am going to use, tramping over the rocks of your country. I am going to let you find out how sharp some of those stones are.”

He picked up the treacherous king and tossed him out of the upper window of the palace to the rocks below. The king of the White Nation would never set another task for any man.

Then Dermot searched high and low for Finn. Everyone got out of his way, but still he could not find his chief. When he was almost in despair, he met an old woman.

“I will lead you to Finn,” she said. “It is I who have been caring for him.”

She did as she promised. Dermot was so happy on seeing Finn that he wanted to embrace him. Finn pushed him away.

Dermot’s feelings were hurt. “If any man had gone through what I have to rescue me, I would not seem ungrateful,” he said. 99

“It is not ingratitude,” said Finn. “My thumb tells me that we have little time to lose. The king’s daughter has gone off to enchant another victim. We must get away while she is gone.”

The two friends hastened to the shore, taking what food they could on the way. Then they raised the sails and pointed the boat toward Erin. Finn placed Dermot in the stern to watch, while he managed the boat. Every few minutes he would say, “Do you see anything?” Dermot would answer, “I see nothing but waves and sky.”

They were nearing the shores of Erin when Finn asked the question again.

“I see a bird that looks like an eagle,” said Dermot.

“Then we are lost,” cried Finn. “She is following.”

“Is there no way to release you?” asked Dermot.

“There is,” answered Finn, “but I am in honor bound not to tell you of it.”

The boat sped swiftly on, with the bird ever gaining. When near the land, the two champions sprang ashore, just as the bird turned the boat over and perched upon the hull. She saw them on the land and flew after them. The instant she struck the earth she became a woman. Rushing up to Finn she threw her arms around his neck.

“Come back with me and be my husband,” she begged. “You shall be the king of the White Nation.” 100

It made Dermot angry to see the actions of the woman who had caused them both so much trouble. He swung his sword against the hillside in anger. So great was the blow that a valley appeared where the sword struck. A great shower of dirt, far more than the seven shovelfuls, fell over Finn and the woman.

Finn put the enchantress from him. “I thank you, Dermot,” he said. “You have released me from her bonds.”

The woman gave a cry of rage, became an eagle once more and flew out over the ocean. Finn and Dermot hastened to join the Fenians.

One day Finn and his companions, while out hunting, had stopped to cook some of the game. Dermot, Conan and several other Fenians were in the party. The horses had been put into an inclosure so that they might feed while the men rested. It was during the meal that the guard, who had been put upon a nearby hill to watch for the approach of an enemy, came rushing up with the news that a great giant was coming toward them from the south. The man had hardly time to tell the news when the giant, himself, appeared.

He was tall and ungainly, with joints that bent outward at each step, as though they had been fastened together with strings. He was dressed in the skins of animals, with the hairy side out. Covering his face was a growth of the same colored hair, so it was difficult to tell where the garments left off and the skin began.

His face seemed formed no more firmly than his body. His jaw hung loosely, showing a ragged set of huge teeth. One eye was higher than the other. His nose was as rough as a ridge of hills. In one hand he held a huge club, the end of which cut deep furrows in the earth as he dragged it along. From the other hand was a leading thong attached to the halter of a horse.

102

This animal was no better favored than the master. Its joints seemed just as loosely hung together. Its coat was the color of the soot from a chimney. Its backbone was like a knotted clothesline with a black rug hung over it. When the animal walked, its legs bent outward at the center, while its scraggly tail and many cornered head swayed from side to side in opposite directions.

When the giant saw the Fenians he dropped the thong and approached by himself. The animal let its head drop dejectedly, and its legs bowed outward like the hoops of a barrel. It seemed about to fall to pieces.

"I am looking for Finn MacCool," growled the giant.

Finn rose and came toward him. "I am he whom you seek," he said.

"I have come to take service with you," said the giant.

"If you need work, go prop up your horse," shouted Conan. The Fenians laughed loudly.

"I do not like the behavior of your men," said the giant, "yet do I still seek service. I have heard that you are a good master, and that you will pay a man whatever he asks."

"I have never refused service to any man who asked it, nor have I ever refused to give a servant any reasonable wage requested," said Finn.

103

"Then I would serve you," declared the giant. "I am known as the Worthless Servant because I never give my master what he pays for. I always fail to do any task he sets me, and what I do is never done well. Moreover, I eat more than any two men and grumble unceasingly about the way I am treated."

"You give yourself a bad name," said Finn with a laugh. "Nevertheless, you have asked for service, so I shall give it to you."

"Then may I turn my horse into the pasture with the others?" asked the giant.

Finn gave his permission and went back to his meal. The giant opened the gate of the inclosure, took off the halter and let the animal loose. That done, he came over to the table and proceeded to eat everything within reach.

The decrepit old horse changed entirely when its master left it. No longer was it mild and sleepy. It kicked its heels high in the air, let out a snort and proceeded to bite and kick every animal it could reach. These other horses could make no stand against the newcomer, nor could they seem to get away from it. At last the giant's horse had injured all the animals except the one belonging to Conan. It was viciously pursuing this one.

"Look here," roared Conan. "Go tie up that ugly brute before it injures my horse."

104

The giant kept on eating. "There's the halter," he said between bites. "If you do not like the way he acts, go tie him yourself."

Conan needed no second invitation. He ran into the pasture and put the halter on the great beast. As soon as it was caught, the animal resumed its dejected pose. Conan pulled and pulled with all his might, but he exerted himself without result. The horse would not move. The other Fenians gathered around and offered much advice and many taunts.

"Shame on you, Conan," cried one. "A Fenian and unable to lead one little horse!"

"Take him by the tail," shouted another. "Perhaps it travels the other way."

"Better practice on a sheep until you grow up," came from a third.

Conan lost his temper. He began abusing the men who were joking him, saying all the cutting things he could think of. His anger extended to the horse. He began beating it with a heavy club. Still the animal stood looking dejectedly at the ground and giving no sign that it felt the blows.

Fergus True Lips, the poet of the Fenians, now gave some advice.

"Many a horse will not go when pulled by the halter," he said. "Try riding him."

Conan sprang to the back of the horse and again tried to get it to move. This method proved no better than the other. Again Fergus made a suggestion.

105

"He is used to the weight of a heavier man than you. Let more Fenians get upon his back until the combined weight shall equal that of the giant."

This advice the Fenians were glad to follow. One after another climbed up until fourteen were astride that sharp backbone. Still the animal would not move.

The Fenians were enjoying the sport. Those on the back of the animal called out jibes to those on the ground, while these made jokes at the expense of the mounted ones.

In the meantime the giant had finished eating all the food on the table. He now approached Finn in great anger.

"It seems to me that the stories I have heard of your justice were all false," he growled.

"What makes you think so?" asked Finn.

"You stand by and see your men abusing my horse, yet you do nothing to stop them," he complained.

"I am sure they but keep your horse from injuring their own animals," said Finn.

"I am through with your service," declared the giant. "If I had never come at all, still would I have been here too long. Give me my wages and let me go."

"What wages can you expect when you have just come?" asked Finn. "All you have done is to eat a meal at my expense."

"Again I see that the stories told of you are not true," said the giant. "You promised to give me what wages I asked and now you refuse."

"You have asked no wages," cried Finn, becoming angry at the unreasonable request. "You but trifle with me when you ask pay for eating my food."

"Since I can get no pay, I shall leave without it. Perhaps your men will give me my wages more willingly."

He strode off toward the sea, taking long but shuffling steps. The horse moved after him, slowly at first, but with ever increasing speed. The Fenians were still on his back.

"Get off!" cried Fergus. The men tried desperately, but they were fastened as tight as if they had grown there.

"Is there no man among you who will stop this beast?" shouted Conan, when he found that they were moving away from the Fenian camp.

A new member of the band ran after the animal and seized it by the tail. Instead of stopping it, he, too, came under the enchantment and could not let go.

The giant suddenly lost all his awkwardness. He began to run with the speed of the wind. The horse also became full of life and fleet of foot.

"I charge you, Finn," called Conan, "not to take any rest until you have rescued us."

Before the startled Fenians could realize what had happened, the giant and the horse were at the edge of the sea. They entered the water at full speed. As they advanced, the waves parted for them and closed again after they had passed.

Thus disappeared the Worthless Servant and the fifteen Fenians he had taken for his wages.

## II.

As soon as they had gone, Finn began preparations to go to their rescue. He asked Fergus for advice as to where they might find a suitable ship. Fergus replied that there was one about five miles distant. Finn called Dermot and a small body of the bravest of his men together and told them that they were to accompany him. All were delighted to go upon such an adventure.

The party had gone but a short distance when they met two handsome young men, dressed in green garments and without any weapons of war. One carried a light wand in his hand.

"We crave to enter thy service, O Finn," said the elder of the two.

"Very well," answered Finn. "We are on a difficult errand and need only men of experience, but you may join the Fenians in our rear."

"It is to go with you that we seek service," said the stranger.

"Have you any special talents that would be of value to us on a difficult adventure?" asked Finn.

"I can be of great service, if your adventure takes you upon the sea," replied the elder. "I am called Quick-Builder. If you cover your heads for the space of a minute I can cause the harbor to be filled with ships of every description. After you have selected the one you wish, all the others will disappear."

"That would be a great help to us now," said Finn. "And what can you do?" he asked the younger.

"I am called Keen-Sight," the boy replied. "I can follow any track on land, air or water. I can trace the eagle to her nest or the fish upon his journey."

"Such a talent will be of great assistance," said Finn. "I take you both into my service. Quick-Builder, produce your ships."

The Fenians obeyed the command to cover their heads. They heard the sound of the young man's wand strike on wood. Then they looked when he bade them. They were greatly astonished to find that he had done what he claimed. Finn chose the boat which suited his needs. He ordered his men to get on board and take the oars. No sooner were they on this ship than every other one disappeared.

Then the lad, Keen-Sight, took his place in the prow of the boat and called directions to the steersman. They sped on over the ocean until they were stopped by a high precipice of rock, seemingly the edge of a great island.

"Here ends the track," announced Keen-Sight.

"No horse could have climbed that cliff," declared Fergus.

"No," answered Finn. "But a horse could pass under it. Noted you not the way the waves parted for the giant and his horse? I greatly believe that we are dealing with the subjects of King Under the Waves."

"If that is so, it would seem to be our duty to get on shore and see where we may go," said Fergus.

"If any man can climb that cliff it is Dermot," declared Finn.

Dermot looked at the face of the precipice and noted a rocky shelf about half way up. From that on there seemed to be footholds.

"I think I can scale it," he said.

He had the Fenians clear off the length of the deck. Then taking his sword and holding it in front of him like a pole, he ran from stern to prow. He used the sword as a lever and sprang lightly to the rocky shelf. The Fenians set up a cheer at the splendid feat. Dermot waved to them and soon disappeared from view.

Once over the rocks he found himself in a pleasant country of trees and little brooks. He could see neither houses nor people. He walked on and on without seeing a living thing. At last, tired and thirsty, he stopped to drink from a well of clear water beside the road. As he touched his lips to the water a man appeared beside him.

"How dare you drink from my well?" he demanded.

"I could see no harm in taking a drink from an open well," said Dermot.

"Then you are little better than a thief," declared the newcomer.

"You are very uncivil to say so," answered Dermot. "I shall not leave this place until I have had satisfaction for that insult."

He grappled with the man and wrestled with him for a decision. When it seemed that he must win the victory, the man rolled into the well and disappeared.

The next day the same thing happened. The same man appeared, the same struggle was gone through with, and once more he disappeared in the waters of the well. Dermot had no intention of leaving until he had beaten this fellow. On the third day, when the time for disappearance came, Dermot clung to him and went into the water with him.

Judge to his surprise to find himself not in a well at all, but in a beautiful country with wealth and plenty on every side. Dermot did not have to guess where he was. Every Fenian had heard of this land, but no mortal had ever entered it before. He was in the Land Under the Waves. The well had been the entrance.

When Dermot released his hold on the man with whom he had been struggling, the fellow lost no time in getting away. With the start he got by his quickness he soon disappeared among the trees. Dermot had to go on alone. Before long he found himself before a beautiful castle. At the gate was a guard of seven warriors on either side. The Fenian had only time to draw his sword before they all set upon him.

But these under-sea champions were no match for him either in strength or quickness. He quickly defeated the fourteen guards and many others who came out of the castle to their aid. In the evening, tired from his struggle with the man at the well, and his fighting at the castle gate, he went into the woods and was soon sound asleep.

He was awakened by the touch of a hand on his shoulder. He quickly sprang to his feet, his hand on his sword, to face this newcomer. It was a knight in armor, fully equipped with weapons, but the smile on his face showed that he had not come for fighting.

"Do not draw your sword, for I am a friend," he said. "Come with me so that you may have food and a better and more comfortable bed."

"I would be foolish did I refuse such an offer," replied Dermot. "Lead the way and I will follow."

The knight led him into a small castle some distance away and took him into the banquet hall, where plenty of food and drink was still on the table. Thirty other knights rested on their beds in the room, and some rose on the entrance of the Fenian. One was the man who had wrestled with Dermot.

"You may be a friend, but you have brought me to an enemy," he said to his guide.

"He is not your enemy," replied the knight. "This man was the messenger I sent to bring you here."

Dermot thought back over the three days of wrestling and of the way the man had left him to face the guards of the castle.

"I should say that your messenger had some rather rough and unsatisfactory methods," said Dermot. "If he was to lead me here, why did he not tell me so?"

The knight smiled. "I understand your surprise. It was necessary for him to do just as he did, for it is only possible to enter the Land Under the Sea in the manner in which you came. But sit down and eat. I shall explain as you satisfy your hunger."

Dermot needed no second invitation. The knight sat down at the table with him while the others went back to their couches.

"I am known as the Knight of Valor," his host began. "And I am the rightful ruler of this land. By a trick my brother has seized the kingdom and is reigning in my stead. All he has left me is this small castle and the thirty knights whom you see about you. When I heard that Dermot of the Fenians had landed on the island, I determined to enlist your help. I sent one of my men to the well to wait for you. The result you know."

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"If I was to be brought here to help you, why was I left alone to face that castle guard?" asked Dermot.

"That is a fair question," answered the knight. "You see, I had heard great tales of your strength, but I did not know if it was greater than that of the men of our land. That castle is the stronghold of my brother, and those were his men. Your combat with them showed me that if you will help us, we can wrest the kingdom from his wicked hands. My people are suffering from my brother's rule; will you help me to free them?"

"You have been fair with me," answered Dermot. "I will help you. I will not hold it against you that your guide deserted me before the castle, since that combat leaves us fewer men to meet tomorrow."

"Your willingness affords me great pleasure," said the knight. "I am sure that tomorrow night will see me once more upon my rightful throne."

Dermot finished his meal and then was shown a bed where he spent the night.

With the first streaks of morning light, the little castle became a scene of busy preparations. Each of the thirty knights buckled on his armor, took up his shield and announced himself willing to follow Dermot's orders. The Knight of Valor, fully armed, took his place at Dermot's side, and the little army went forth to battle. When they approached the castle of the false king, Dermot called out:

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"Come forth, false king, and fight me for your kingdom!"

This the usurper was afraid to do. He knew better than to risk his life against such a hero. For answer he sent out all his forces and only appeared when his warriors formed a protecting wall between him and his enemies. There he remained in safety. Dermot placed his men in the form of a wedge with himself in the lead and went into battle.

Now, the army of the false king was only loyal to him because he had paid them to place him upon the throne. Then, too, they feared this terrible Fenian, who had faced them the night before. On the other hand, the Knight of Valor and his men, cheered by having such a fighter on their side, fought as they had never fought before. In a short time the wedge went through the opposing forces, leaving the wicked brother unprotected.

This man did not wait any longer. He turned and ran into the palace for safety, closing the gate behind him. His forces would not keep up the struggle after their leader left them. They threw down their weapons in token that they were through.

115

Dermot determined to get hold of this brother. He did not stop for the gate, but used his sword as a lever and jumped over the wall just as he had gone up the cliff. He caught the pretender before he could get across the courtyard, and brought him out where his men could see him. There Dermot released him and once more asked him if he was ready to fight for the right to retain the kingdom.

The wicked fellow's knees shook to the rapid beating of his heart. They trembled so he had to get down on them to make them support him at all.

"Spare me! Spare me!" he cried.

"Are you willing to give up the throne to your brother, the rightful king?" asked Dermot.

"I am if my men are satisfied," answered the man, still on his knees.

For an answer his men gave a cheer for the Knight of Valor. Then Dermot picked out thirty men for the false king.

"You shall have what you gave your brother," he said. "Now, get up and lead your men to the castle you set apart for him. That shall be your kingdom."

Then the Knight of Valor led his new friend into the castle. They were served by the happy people, happy in the return of their own kind ruler. A joyous celebration was held in Dermot's honor, but that hero cut it short by saying:

116

"Now that I have helped you, you can show your gratitude by giving me some assistance. I would find the giant with the bony horse who took away fifteen of the Fenians. Also, I would get back to Finn with what information you can give me."

"I suppose you mean the man who calls himself the Worthless Servant?" asked the Knight of Valor.

Dermot nodded his head.



"Then I can help you. That man was no giant, but a friend of mine, who took that shape to get some of the Fenians to come over and help him. He is about to be attacked by Donn, High King of the World, and needs all the help he can command. Tomorrow you and I shall go at the head of my army to give him assistance. You will find Finn and your companions already there. You see, we worked together. Keen-Sight and Quick-Builder are our men, whom we sent to bring you here. Tomorrow you shall see them all."

### III.

Finn and his companions had waited but a short time after Dermot had disappeared over the cliff. The lad, Keen-Sight, had kept quiet until Dermot was out of sight. Then he turned to the Fenians and said:

"Though the horse and men went in here, I think I can find you a harbor which will lead us to the same place." 117

"That you should have told us before Dermot left," said Finn.

Keen-Sight made no reply.

"Well, it does not matter," said Finn. "Guide us to the harbor. Dermot will be safe and will find us later."

Again the men bent to their oars and rowed in the direction given by Keen-Sight. Some days later they came to a broad harbor in which a thousand ships like theirs could have anchored. The Fenians made fast the boat and sprang ashore. Still guided by Keen-Sight, they journeyed a short distance toward the interior of the country.

Suddenly a large army appeared, coming toward them. The Fenians drew up in battle array, but Finn told them to have no fear.

"For," he explained, "do you not see Dermot in the lead? It is easy to see that he is not a prisoner."

When Dermot saw his friends, he let out a loud shout of joy and hastened to meet them. The Knight of Valor came up and extended a welcome to the Fenians.

"We are in pursuit of the man who calls himself the Worthless Servant," said Finn. "Can you give us directions for finding him?"

"I can do that," said the Knight of Valor. "We are now but a short distance from his palace." 118

Then they all fell in together and walked on until they saw before them a handsome castle.

"It is here the man lives," said the Knight of Valor. "He is really the king of a large country, but took the shape you saw him in to enlist your aid."

The Knight of Valor raised his voice and gave a loud cry. Soon the gates of the castle opened. Out came the ugly old giant followed by his horse. On its back still rode the fourteen Fenians, while the fifteenth still clung to its tail.

"Have you been like that ever since you left us?" asked Finn, when the horse approached near enough for the men to hear his voice.

"We have not," answered Conan. He and the others slipped off the horse's back and came to greet their comrades. "We have been treated like kings. We merely came out in state so that you might not forget how we arrived."

"Your pardon, O Finn," said a voice.

Finn looked at the spot where the giant had been standing, but saw a strong young champion in his stead. "I am Avarta, ruler of this land. If I played the part of the Worthless Servant, it was to bring here enough Fenians to give us help in the hour of need. My messengers have informed me that the High King of the World is about to attack us. Without your help I would be defeated; with it I shall conquer." 119

"Why did you not request my help, if you needed it, instead of taking away my men and forcing me to come after them?" asked Finn.

"Had I asked you to come to a far country to fight, you would have refused. You would have told me that it was your duty to remain in Erin to defend it," said Avarta. "But I did know that you would not refuse to come to rescue your own men, and that you would help if you were here."

"It is true," said Finn. "I hold no hard feelings against you. My men and myself will do our part against the High King of the World."

Then the leaders went into the banquet hall of the castle. The other warriors were quartered in the spacious courtyard. Avarta caused everything in his power to be done for their comfort. For a day and two nights they feasted, rested and waited for the arrival of the enemy.

### IV.

On the morning of the second day after their arrival, a great fleet anchored in the harbor. The men immediately began landing in great numbers. At their head was the son of the High King, and with him was his sister, Teasa, who wanted to see her brother capture the castle.

Finn placed his men in battle array; giving to the Knight of Valor and his warriors the defense of the right wing, and to Avarta and his army the duty of holding the left wing. With his Fenians, Finn took the center, where the fighting would be the heaviest.

The two armies met in deadly combat. The two wings held their own with difficulty, being about evenly matched with the enemy. But the Fenians, with desperate valor, overwhelmed the enemy center with great slaughter. It was a great surprise to the High King's son. He rallied his men bravely and gave them an example of valor, but it was useless. Finn was everywhere, now engaging and defeating a score of warriors, now helping with one division of his men and now another. Dermot, the pride of the Fenians, was always in the thick of the struggle. His flashing sword made a circle of steel about him. No man could stand against him.

Teasa, who had come to see the prowess of her brother, forgot all about him in watching the deeds of Finn. She admired his fair hair and manly bearing, and his bravery appealed to her even more strongly. It was while watching him drive back her father's army that she fell deeply in love with him. When her brother gave orders for his men to fall back from the unequal struggle, Teasa left her own side and went over to the Fenians. She found Finn and said to him:

"I have watched you in the fight today, O Finn, and my heart called out to you, even against my own brother. I pray you take me to Erin and make me your wife."

"That I cannot do, fair maiden," said Finn. "I have no need of a wife."

"You cannot refuse me," she cried. "No true champion should refuse a maiden when she offers herself to him."

Finn was honest in his refusal. He still mourned for Saba. Anyhow, he knew that to take the daughter of the High King would cause a great deal of trouble.

"You had better go back to your father while there is still time," he told her kindly.

"That I will not do," declared Teasa. "Already my father knows that I have come over to his enemies. If I go back he will kill me. If I cannot have your love, I can claim your protection from those who would kill me. I put you under bonds to take me with you to Erin."

"I beg you to release me from such bonds," said Finn. "Nothing but trouble can come of it."

But the maiden insisted that she claimed his protection as a Fenian, and he could not refuse her.

When Donn saw the retreat of his son and his army, he called a council of his wise men to see what it was best to do.

"This is no time to attack Avarta," said one of them. "The Fenians are with him, and we have not men enough to stand against them. The best thing for us to do is to retire and wait a more favorable time, when the men of Erin have gone home."

This advice was repeated by the others of the council. Just then the son came on board and approached his father.

"We are defeated," he said. "I have ordered my men to retire, lest they all be killed and we gain nothing by it."

"It is well," said Donn. "But tell me, why is not your sister with you? She went with you to battle and I do not see her returning."

The son hung his head, afraid to tell his father the truth.

"Speak, my son!" cried Donn. "She cannot be killed! Surely the Fenians do not make war on women!"

"Far better had she died," said the young man. "She has left us and gone to the Fenians."

Then the High King lifted up his voice in a long cry of grief and anger. Teasa was very dear to him. He could not bear to think that she had gone over to the enemy.

"I am sure she is held against her will," said Donn. "Send heralds to this Fenian and order him to surrender our daughter to us."

But the heralds came back with the word that Finn refused. Then Donn stood out upon the highest deck and raised his arms above his head in a vow of vengeance.

"Hear me, O Finn!" he called. "You have taken my daughter from me, and I vow that I will be revenged upon you. Though it take me all the rest of my life to prepare, and though I must get every king in the world to help me, I vow I shall not rest until I have come to Erin and have punished you for this deed."

Then the High King raised the sails of his fleet, his men bent to their oars, and the battle fleet sailed out of the harbor.

Dermot turned to his chief. "I fear that trouble is about to come upon Erin and the Fenians," he said. "Chew your thumb and see if it is not so."

Finn shook his head sadly. "I have no need of my thumb to tell me that what you say is true. Yet, the maiden claimed my protection, and I could not, under our rules, refuse her."

"That is so," agreed Dermot.

There was great rejoicing in the land when the fleet sailed away. Avarta thanked the Fenians for their aid and gave them many rich gifts. Finn was satisfied. Avarta, however, was willing to make still further amends.

"Since I took away your men by an enchantment, it is only fair that you should make an award for me to fulfill," he insisted.

"There is no award I would require of you," said Finn, who never asked favors of any man to whom he had given help.

"Stay, O Finn," cried Conan. "You did not have to ride all day on that bony back, which was sharper than a sword. If there is an award to be made, I am the one entitled to it."

Finn would have said no, fearing that Conan would ask for gold and thus put shame upon the Fenians. But Avarta turned to Conan politely and told him to name his award.

"It is this," said Conan. "You are to bring out your bony horse and place upon its back fourteen of your own nobles. You are to bring them to Erin, so some one else shall feel the pain of that journey."

The Fenians roared with laughter. They were glad that Conan had not yielded to his desire for gain, but had made a good award.

"And I wish to add the sentence, that Avarta himself shall cling to the animal's tail," said the young Fenian who had made the trip in that manner. "Only in that way can he appreciate the pain I bore in coming."

"The award is just," declared Avarta. "Get on your ship. When you arrive in Erin we shall be with you."

So the Fenians got on their ship and went back as rapidly as sails and oars could take them. When they landed in Erin the ship disappeared, but where it had been, the waves parted and the great horse, with fourteen nobles on its back and the Worthless Servant clinging to its tail, came out on the shore.

"I have carried out the award," said Avarta.

"You have," said Finn. "Now, I pray you, let your men dismount that all of you may partake of our hospitality."

There was no answer. Where the horse and men had stood there was nothing. They had disappeared as a mist taken up by the sun.

It was some time after the pursuit of the Worthless Servant that the events of this story took place. Finn, knowing that sooner or later his forces would have to meet those of the High King of the World, spent most of his time building up the numbers of his Fenians, so that he would have a force sufficient when the time came for the great struggle.

This angered Cormack, High King of Tara, to whom Finn owed allegiance. Cormack had been very jealous of the power of the Fenians and of the hold Finn had upon them. Sometimes these Fenians did make demands on the people of the country, and some of these demands were unreasonable. You see, Finn was getting to be quite an old man. While his courage and his wisdom were as great as of old, he was not with his men as constantly as he had been in his earlier years. Probably they took advantage of this fact and did things he would not have allowed had he known of them.

Cormack made up his mind that the overbearing conduct of some of the Fenians was caused by the fact that Finn had no respect for the authority of the High King. Then, when Finn began to bend every effort to increase the fighting strength of the Fenians, Cormack got the idea that his leader was about to take the kingdom away from him.

The quarrel began to grow serious. Some of the friends of both men, however, urged that a stronger alliance be formed between the two to make a serious break impossible. This was to be accomplished by having Finn marry Grainne, the daughter of Cormack.

The two men finally agreed that this wedding should take place, in spite of the fact that Finn had a grandson older than the girl who was to be his wife. Cormack was willing because he really feared Finn's power if used against him. Finn was willing because he knew of the struggle which was coming, and he wanted no quarrels at home to interfere with his preparations.

Now, Grainne had never seen this mighty leader. She knew him only from the stories of his many deeds of valor. To have such a noted hero for a husband seemed quite the proper thing, especially when she was told that the marriage was arranged for the good of Erin. She told her father that she was willing to have Finn for a husband.

So, the Fenian chief, attended by his son, Ossian, his grandson, Oscar, his friend, Dermot, and a guard of honor, went to the hall at Tara for the wedding celebration. A great feast for the men of both parties was held in the banquet hall. During the meal Cormack and Finn discussed their differences and plans for a better understanding.

Naturally the young girl was anxious to have a look at the man who was to be her husband. While the feast was in progress she came to the door of the hall with her maid, who was to point out Finn to her mistress. The maid did so. Grainne was amazed.

"Surely not that old man!" she exclaimed.

The maid told her that there could be no mistake. Then she named over all the rest of the party in turn. Grainne made up her mind that she would not go on with the ceremony.

"My father did not tell me that he was mating me with a man old enough to be my grandfather," she said. "If he had, I should never have consented. What can that old man want with a wife?"

"The marriage is to bind the Fenians more closely to the throne," said the maid.

"That could be done in other ways," replied Grainne. "If Finn sought me for a wife for his son, I would be willing to go on with the match."

The maid explained that Ossian already had a wife and could not take another.

"Well, the grandson would be still better," insisted Grainne. "But I will never marry that old man; never, never, never!"

"Then it would be best for you to so inform your father immediately," advised the maid. "Even now your refusal will cause more bitter feeling."

"No," said Grainne. "My father would insist upon the match. If I get out of this marriage it will have to be by my own efforts."

Then the girl went to her rooms in the palace and prepared a jug of wine, putting in a drug which would bring a heavy sleep to all who tasted of it. This she gave to the maid, telling her to go to the hall and give a sip from the bride's cup to everyone except Oscar and Dermot. To these she was to refuse it.

The maid followed her instructions. All to whom it was offered took a sip of the drugged liquor. When they were asleep Grainne, dressed in her most beautiful robes, entered the hall and went straight to Oscar and Dermot. She asked Oscar to marry her and take her away. Oscar indignantly refused to be false to the man who was both his chief and his grandfather.

But now Grainne had looked upon the Love Spot. She forgot all about Oscar in her new love for this young Fenian hero. She now pled with Dermot to marry her and take her away.

Dermot threw off her arms from around his neck.

"Think you that I would cast aside my honor and lose my place with the Fenians?" he cried. "Never shall it be said that Dermot was false to a friend! Death would be better than that!"

But Grainne was not to be denied. She forgot everything but her love for this man. She used a trick to compel Dermot to take her, the same ruse that Teasa had used to force Finn to take her to Erin.

"If you will not have me for your wife, I put you under bonds to save me from this marriage, which is distasteful to me. I bind you, by your Fenian oath, to take me away and guard me from all pursuers until I release you."

Poor Dermot was sorely puzzled. Whichever course he took he must lose his honor. He must either break his vow to give protection to a woman whenever it was asked, or he must be disloyal to Finn.

"What can I do?" he asked Oscar.

"To give you advice is the thing I would gladly refuse," answered Oscar. "Since you ask it, I must tell you that your honor binds you to do as she asks."

So Dermot and Grainne went out through the little gate in the palace wall and fled into the forest, accompanied only by Dermot's faithful hound.

## II.

When the men awoke from their drugged sleep, and Oscar told Finn and Cormack what had happened, both men were exceedingly angry. They immediately ordered a pursuit of the fugitives. For days Finn and his men followed the trail of the two. While they often came upon campfires that still smouldered, showing where the pursued pair had stopped, they never were able to catch up with them. Dermot was caring for Grainne with what food he could procure in the forest. He was kind to her, but steadily resisted all her efforts to get him to marry her. At each camping place he left a sign that Finn would recognize as a pledge that he was not fleeing of his own free will, but because the maiden had put him under bonds. 131

This treatment, however, did not please Grainne. All her pleading for his love met with no response. At last she appealed to a Druid for help. These Druids had great magical power, if they could be prevailed upon to use them. Grainne did not tell him who she was. She played a part calculated to excite the pity of the magician.

"I am in deep trouble," she told him. "I fear that only you can be of assistance to me. I can tell by the kindness of your face that you are always willing to help a maiden in distress."

The Druid was flattered by this artful speech.

"What can I do for you, O maiden?" he asked.

"I have just been married, and my husband is falling in love with another maiden," lied Grainne. "I would have you do something to make me more beautiful, so that my husband will love me again."

"I could not make you more beautiful than you are already," said the Druid. He was something of a flatterer himself. 132

"Then give me something to kill me," wailed Grainne. "I cannot live without my husband's love." At this point she burst into a violent sobbing. The heart of the Druid was touched by her pretended grief.

"But if I cannot make you more beautiful, there is something else I can do for you," he said.

"What is that?" asked Grainne, drying her eyes.

"I can give you a liquid to pour into the drink of your husband. As long as the effect lasts, he will love you better than anything else in the world."

"Give it to me at once," said Grainne. "If I can but win back his love, I will keep his heart forever."

So the Druid gave her the love charm, and Grainne administered it to Dermot in his food. Immediately he became wildly in love with her and yielded to her pleadings to marry her at once.

Finn's pursuit had daily become less insistent. He had never been strongly in favor of marrying Grainne, and his anger against Dermot became less keen. When he heard that the two were married he abandoned the pursuit entirely. He sent word to Dermot that if he kept out of his way he would no longer seek to punish him, but that he had been expelled from the Fenians for disloyalty to his leader.

And so it happened that Finn lost his best friend and his companion in his adventures. The Fenians, also, lost their best fighter. This is the reason why, in the next story, which tells of the greatest battle the army ever engaged in, Dermot was not there to help. 133

The years sped by with no sign of the attack by the High King of the World. One less wise than Finn would have decided that Donn had given up his revenge. But Finn was not fooled. He knew that the attack would come, and that each year of delay meant a greater force against him. He used the time to build up a stronger defense.

He placed a guard on a hill overlooking every harbor of Erin. These men were supposed never to leave their posts without placing some one to watch in their stead. At the important harbors, the watch was strictly kept, year after year. But the guards of the small and unimportant ports grew careless and spent much of their time asleep or in the nearby villages.

So it happened that when the great fleet finally came, there was no one to give warning. The harbor of Ventry Strand was the one picked out by Donn for his landing. He chose this harbor because it was small and unimportant. He was guided by a traitor who had been expelled from the ranks of the Fenians, a man who knew the placing of the forces and who knew that the guards of the small harbors like Ventry Strand had become very careless.

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When the guard on the hill awoke he was horrified to see the water black with ships, and hundreds of men landing on the shore. He could see what a tremendous force the High King had gathered. There were the banners of the Kings of France, of Spain, of Norway, of Denmark, and many others he did not recognize.

The guard was terrified at the results of his neglect of duty. He was afraid to face Finn and admit that he had not been faithful to his charge. He did the next best thing. He sent a messenger to his chief telling him of the arrival of the enemy. Then he went down to meet the hosts alone, and died fighting bravely as was the duty of a Fenian.

But this guard was not the only one to show his bravery that day. All through history we find records of small bodies of devoted men who held back great armies while their comrades prepared for the fight. The battle of Ventry Strand was no exception. This time, however, it was not men, but boys who sacrificed themselves to hold back the enemy until the Fenians could arrive.

In many of our stories you have read of the requirements of strength necessary to become a Fenian. No doubt you have wondered if there was not some training school for boys who would be eligible, if they could pass the test. There was such a training. It was called the Boys' Corps. All boys could join this group when old enough to begin their training. They remained in it until they were able to join the Fenians or had failed to pass the entrance test. Here they began their training about the age of twelve, though some of the great heroes enrolled and became leaders at a much younger age. Finn, you remember, defeated the giant Midna at the age of ten, but he had proved himself a leader of the Boys' Corps long before that.

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These groups had teachers who instructed their pupils in the Twelve Books of Poetry, and gave them training in the use of the weapons of the chase and of warfare. The boys did not live at home, but camped with the others of the group and lived on what they could kill, just as did the Fenians. Their training was much the same as that described in stories of the Spartan boys in Greece.

One of these training groups was in the hills of Ventry when the forces of Donn were landing. Their leader, a boy of sixteen, who had proven himself the most expert in his training, saw the situation and thus addressed his companions:

"Behold, an enemy has landed upon the shores of Erin, and there is no one to stay them. It will take Finn and his men all day to reach here. In the meantime, there are two courses open to us. We can seek safety in the hills and let the foreigner pillage our country, or we can go down and die fighting in its defense. It is for you to choose. If we hide we may grow up to become Fenians. But can we look Finn in the face and tell him that we proved our worth by hiding?"

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The messenger told Finn that the enemy had landed  
at Ventry Strand

From Battle of Ventry Strand

He drew a line on the ground and stepped over it.

"I, for one, prefer to show these men what sort of boys grow up to be the men of Erin. Those who will follow me to the strand to die bravely fighting for our country, will step across the line."

With a shout every boy jumped over the line to the side of their leader. Then, with shields in front and weapons ready, the Boys' Corps marched down to meet the invaders.

"Ho! Ho!" laughed one of the soldiers. "Have the men of Erin hidden in their holes and sent the children to greet us?"

"Better gain what glory you can before the men of Erin arrive to cut short your boasting," cried the boy leader, dashing at the man who had mocked them.

Soon the whole boy force was engaged in the unequal struggle against an overwhelming number of men hardened to battle. But though they were boys and knew that they must die in the end, there was no one but showed the fighting blood of his fathers. One after another they went down, but all that day they held the forces of the High King on the shore. When the Fenians arrived that evening the enemy was still on his ships and at the water's edge. But where were the heroic boys? Not one was left. Only the peasants, who had watched the fight from the hillsides, could tell the story of that noble stand.

When Finn came up and saw the forces against him, he realized that the battle would be long and hard. His only hope was to use small bodies of his fighters against the foe, and trust to the bravery of his men to wear down the forces of the enemy.

"Shall we attack in force and drive them into the sea?" asked Gaul. "Every Fenian should be able to account for ten of the enemy."

"They will have to do more than that," declared Finn. "We must send out two hundred of our men each day and let them make what headway they can. Only in that way can we reduce their number enough to make possible their defeat. The Fenians need room to fight and must have strong odds against them to make them do their best. Who will lead the first two hundred?"

"I will lead them," cried Gaul.

"I, too, will go," declared Ossian.

"I will be in the first two hundred," said Oscar.

"So be it," said Finn. "May you spread terror into the hearts of the enemy."

Next morning the two hundred charged into the foe. By nightfall the forces of the High King were cut to pieces. But of the Fenians there was left but Gaul, Ossian and Oscar. Gaul was so badly wounded that he had to be carried back to the camp.

More men landed from the ships and rallied around three men, swordsmiths of the High King, who had led the forces that day, and who had stood against the Fenian heroes until night closed the battle.

The next day Ossian and Oscar led out two hundred fresh men from the Fenian army. They were met by the three smiths and a great force from the army of the High King. All day the battle continued. Each Fenian did great deeds of valor and proved worthy of his name. Toward the close of the day but three smiths and Ossian and Oscar were left to carry on the battle. Oscar, the best swordsman of the Fenians, was holding two of the opposing champions. The third was pressing hard against his father and forcing him backward.

Finn was greatly alarmed for the safety of his son. Of course, under their rules of warfare, no more men could come into the battle after it had started. Finn did the only thing left for him to do. He sent his poet, Fergus, to stand behind Ossian and to sing to him of the great deeds he had done in the past. This encouragement was what Ossian needed. A great strength rose up within him. He forced back his opponent and took his head. Oscar, at the same time, conquered the two, who stood against him.

The victory that day rested with the Fenians. But it was dearly bought. At the end of his combat Oscar sank to the ground, fainting from his many wounds. His father had to carry him back to the camp of the Fenians. It was many months before he was strong enough to again take part in the fighting.

## II.

Not all the brave fighters in the battle of Ventry Strand were on the Fenian side. Other men could face great odds, too. The three smiths, who had fallen that day, had a brother still on the ship of the High King. When this man saw the result of the fight, he let out a mighty shout of grief and rage. He went straight to the High King.

"Tomorrow I am going to meet the two hundred Fenians," he said. "What is more, I am going alone. If any of our men try to interfere with me, I shall kill them."

The High King knew that this man was the greatest champion on his side. He was willing to have him go out and strike terror into the hearts of the Fenians. He gave orders that he should be the only one to land next day.

For the next day's battle Finn had no great leader for his men. One young Fenian, anxious to gain glory for himself, offered to lead the two hundred. Finn let him go. All day long the two hundred

Fenians faced this one champion. By night the foreigner was alone on the field. A shout of victory went up from the ships of the High King. The Fenians were far from joyous to see such valor on the side of the enemy.

The next day this champion again defeated the two hundred Fenians, and for the four days following, the combats ended the same. Finn was getting desperate. He could not go out and meet the man himself, because if he were killed or badly wounded, his men would be leaderless and the forces of the High King would gain the victory.

How he wished for Dermot in this hour of need! The splendid example of this great hero would have done the Fenians more good than a thousand soldiers. Ossian and Oscar, too badly wounded to fight, pled with Finn to relent and send for his one-time champion and dearest friend. But Finn's pride would not permit him to do this. The thought that Dermot had yielded to a woman's plea to be false to his chief, cut him to the heart.

All great men have their moments of weakness. The one dark spot on the record of Finn is his treatment of Dermot. One point we find in his favor. It is the fact that he did not send for Dermot during the battle. If he could not forgive him because he felt the justice of his friend's position, he would not say so because he needed his sword.

In this hour of need another hero arrived on the Fenian side. The son of the King of Ulster heard of this battle and longed to take part in it. Though little more than a boy he went to his father and asked his permission. His father met this request with an angry reply.

"What nonsense!" he exclaimed. "You are only a boy and not fit to go into battle."

The king not only forbade his going, but he set over him a guard of his twelve foster-brothers to see that he did not go without permission. But the boy was not to be denied. He talked so earnestly with his brothers that he fired them with a desire to take part in the great battle. In the end all thirteen slipped away to the camp of Finn.

The boy went before the chief of the Fenians. "I am the son of the King of Ulster," he said. "It is my wish to meet this champion, who is bringing fear into the hearts of the Fenians."

"Go home, boy," said Conan. "This man has slain heroes who could account for a thousand like you."

The boy looked at him in indignation. "I do not know the Fenians," he said. "But I do know that you must be Conan, who speaks good of no man. If you think a boy should not face this champion, why are you here in camp? If I cannot kill this man, I can at least show the foreigners that the boys of Erin have not the cowardice of a Conan!"

Conan had no more to say after that. He hated to hear the truth from the lips of a boy. Finn, because he remembered the fire of his own youth, looked with favor upon the brave lad and consented to his meeting the champion. While they talked a mighty shout came from the shore.

"What is that?" asked the boy.

"That is the champion calling for men to meet him," answered Conan. "He has just finished the last of your bodyguard."

"He shall not have to wait long," said the boy.

A great shout of laughter from the enemy greeted the approach of the new fighter. The champion joined in the jeers.

"Let Finn acknowledge his defeat if he has no more men to send out," he cried. "I do not fight with boys."

"If you do not fight, it will be your last battle," declared the son of the king.

He closed in battle. Before the smith realized that it was a real contest, he had received several small wounds. He began to fight in earnest. But he had met his match at last. They fought until their shields were torn to shreds, and their swords were broken off at the hilts. Then they threw away the weapons and struggled with their bare hands. Over the shore they fought, and finally out into the sea, where they sank from sight.

The men of both sides waited anxiously to see which one would come up. But neither appeared that night. Next morning the two bodies, still locked in a tight embrace, were washed upon the sands. The body of the king's son was on top, his hands still clasping the throat of his opponent, proving that he had won the fight.

### III.

The great battle went on for a year and a day. Sometimes there were single combats, sometimes many men were engaged, but neither side could gain a complete victory. When the year was up the High King resolved to challenge Finn to single combat. He saw that he was losing more men than the Fenians, and that Finn's plan of campaign would win for him in the end.

If he could kill Finn, all the advantage would be on his side. Also, the death of the Fenian chief would make complete his revenge for the loss of his daughter. Donn was not showing such wonderful bravery in offering to meet the Fenian chief. Finn was an old man, without the great strength of his youth. Donn reasoned that he could fight him day after day until Finn was vanquished through weakness. He did not fear for himself. He was protected by enchantment and



could not be killed except with one sword. That weapon was locked up in his castle at home, guarded by his father.

Finn knew that he could not kill the High King without this sword. Yet he accepted the challenge. He had lost so many of his men that he was sick at heart. He welcomed the idea of getting into the fight himself. Even if he were killed, he could still set an example of his unflinching courage. Gaul, Ossian and Oscar were now almost recovered. Even were he killed, he was sure Gaul would carry on the fight.

On the night before the battle between the two leaders, an enchanter from the side of the High King entered the Fenian camp and went straight to Finn.

"I have left the camp of the High King because he has been unjust to me," said the enchanter. "I am here to help you in your fight against him."

Finn thanked him and asked him what he could do.

"Perhaps you do not know that you can only kill him with one sword," said the man.

"I do know it," answered Finn.

"Stand against him tomorrow, and by night you shall have the sword. I shall go to Donn's father and tell him that his son has sent me for his sword to use in the fight against you. His father will give it to me without question."

"Bring me the weapon and I shall reward you," said Finn.

The two leaders met the next day in combat. The High King had no fear and fought recklessly. Finn knew that he must continue the battle until the next day, so he fought with great care and was content with defending himself from the attacks of Donn. This pleased the High King very much. He thought that Finn had lost his strength. He went to his ship that night sure that the next day would bring with it the defeat of the Fenian chief.

But he had a surprise in store for him. The next morning when he came out to the combat he found Finn coming toward him. He turned pale when he recognized the weapon in the hands of his opponent. Fear gripped his heart and destroyed his sense of honor. He tried to win by surprise. Before the signal for combat was given, he struck a mighty blow at Finn.

But for the heroism of one of the Fenians he would have succeeded. This young man rushed in and received the blow intended for his chief.

When Finn saw the death of his man as a result of treachery, a surge of rage gave him all the strength of his youth. He raised the weapon the enchanter had brought, and with one blow finished his combat with Donn. Then, rallying his entire force with his old battle cry, he set upon the leaderless hosts.

That day's battle was the fiercest of all. When night came there was not a man of the invading force left alive. But there were no Fenians left to give battle had there been any more to meet. Everyone of the brave defenders, Finn included, were dead or suffering from severe wounds.

So ended the battle of Ventry Strand. Erin was saved from the invaders, but at a fearful cost. The story reminds one of the Trojan War, of which most of us have read. In that great contest we read of the same desperate heroism. Both were started because of a woman, and both continued until all the fighters on one side were completely destroyed.

For sixteen years after the flight of Grainne and Dermot, the couple lived in their home in the forest. Dermot was not unhappy, now that his remorse for proving disloyal to Finn had grown less keen. He divided his time between hunting in the forest and the training of his children. He never mentioned his former chief or his comrades.

Grainne was not so easily satisfied. She proved to be the kind of woman who is always wishing for something she cannot have. When she was about to be married to Finn, she wanted Dermot. Then, when she had succeeded in getting Dermot to marry her, she decided that she had been foolish to run away from Finn. While he was pursuing them, Grainne had been perfectly happy. She had not wished to be caught, but it pleased her vanity to be running away with one great hero and having another trying to capture her.

When Finn gave up the chase and she was allowed to have the man she had chosen, she was no longer satisfied. She decided that Finn must come and visit them. The reason she gave Dermot for this wish was, that their daughter could never pick a husband if she was never to see any of the heroes of the country. What she really desired was to have Finn come and tell her that he envied Dermot his good fortune in getting such a fine wife, or to have him show, in some way, that he was sorry he could not marry her.

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Dermot finally yielded to her arguments and sent the invitation to Finn. At first the Fenian leader refused to consider such a visit. The invitation reminded him of what he called the treachery of the man who had been his friend. But Ossian and Oscar reasoned with him and urged him to make the visit as a sign of forgiveness. They told him that it did not look well for a mighty leader to hold a grudge for so long. They insisted that it was just his pride which kept him away, and that he really wanted to see Dermot.

Finn finally consented. He took Oscar and Ossian with him and went to the home in the forest.

Their reception was a cordial one. Dermot was like a boy in his pleasure at meeting his former chief and his old friends. As for Finn, he seemed to forget his injured pride in the joy of being once more on good terms with Dermot. For several days it was a happy party. Through the day they hunted together; in the evenings they feasted and told stories of the hard combats of the past. Finn even went so far as to admit that the need of Dermot's sword very nearly caused the defeat of the Fenians in the Battle of Ventry Strand. It seemed as if the past was all forgotten, and that Dermot would once more become a member of the Fenian band.

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But Grainne never was content. Once more she caused trouble between the two men. She soon proved that it was for neither her husband nor her daughter that she desired the visit of Finn. When he had come, he had greeted her cordially, and then had seemed to forget all about her. This hurt her pride. She began to make herself very agreeable to him and to seek him out at every opportunity. She tried to do little things for him which would bring her to his notice.

Now, Grainne could be very charming when she tried, and she was still a very beautiful woman. Finn began to take an interest in her. Then, Grainne, hoping to get some statement of regret from him, called up the circumstances of that flight, sixteen years before.

Finn's anger, which had died almost to ashes, burst into a flame again. He no longer took pleasure in the company of Dermot. Even when he tried to look pleasantly at his host, the fire in his eyes could not be hidden. Ossian saw the change and urged that the visit be brought to a close. Finn put him off angrily and refused to leave.

Grainne was pleased with the results of her scheme. It was not that she did not still love her husband. You see, she knew that Dermot could not be wounded by Finn. She thought there was no danger, and it was pleasing to her vanity to know that once again two fine men were interested in her.

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One night the men were awakened by the continued baying of the hounds. This could only mean that some large animals were prowling around. So, early next morning, they went out upon a hunt. Oscar and Ossian took one path and Finn and Dermot the other. The latter had not gone far when they met an excited peasant, who informed them that a terrible wild boar was roaming about, spreading death and destruction in its path.

Dermot paused. He knew that hunting the wild boar was forbidden to him. The proper thing for him to do was to go back, and he knew it. Finn watched him anxiously.

"You had better go back, Dermot," he said. "This is hardly a safe pastime for you."

Dermot flushed with anger. "It is plain that you desire my death, Finn MacCool," he said, "or you would not say such a thing to me. You know full well that I cannot turn back when you question my bravery."

Finn said no more. He felt sure that Dermot would continue the hunt in spite of the warnings of his foster-father. They had gone but a few yards when a great boar burst out of the forest and made toward them. Dermot hurled his spear. It glanced off the thick skull. He drew his sword, but before he could use it, the boar knocked him down and tore him cruelly with his tusks. Even as he fell, Dermot crushed the skull of the beast with the hilt of his sword.

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Finn had made no move to assist in the killing of the boar. Now he came over and looked at Dermot. The wounded man implored him to do something for him.

"I am sorry to see you this way, Dermot," he said. "But I can never forget that you proved untrue to

me sixteen years ago. There is nothing I can do for you."

"There is," answered Dermot. "You can restore me to health by giving me a drink from your two hands."

"There is no well," said Finn, making excuses.

"There is one just a few paces behind you," said Dermot.

Finn made no move to go. His anger held him back.

"Can't you remember how you were bound and suffering in the dungeon of the White Nation? I did not hesitate to go through every trial to rescue you. Will you refuse me now? For the sake of what I have done for you, give me a drink that will heal me."

Finn was filled with remorse. He went to the well and started back with his cupped hands full of water. But as he walked he saw before him a picture of that hall in Tara. Again he felt the disgrace of having his trusted friend prove disloyal to him. The water trickled through his fingers, and he came back with nothing.

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By that time Oscar and Ossian had come up and had knelt beside the wounded man. Dermot looked up at Finn with a pleading look in his eyes.

"I could not bring it," said Finn. "It is too far to carry it. The water all runs away."

"You can bring it if you wish," insisted Dermot. "I know you are angry because I took Grainne away that night. But Oscar will tell you that it was much against my will. She put me under bonds, and I had to go, just as you had to bring Teasa from the land of Avarta. Your men did not turn against you because you brought trouble to Erin by that act. For the sake of our old friendship, get me the drink before it is too late!"

Once more a flood of pity and remorse came over Finn. He recognized the justice of Dermot's plea. Again he hurried to the well and filled his hands. But when he started back to the dying man he seemed to see Grainne in front of him. She seemed to be smiling at him and beckoning to him. Once more the water ran out through his fingers, and he came back with his hands empty.

When he approached this time, Dermot was too weak to speak. Only his eyes pled for the water. Oscar could not stand it any longer. He sprang to his feet and drew his sword.

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"Though you are my chief, I will not stand by and see you do this great wrong!" he cried. "You must get the water or one of us will never leave this forest alive!"

Oscar's just anger brought Finn to his senses. He put all thoughts of pride and the woman from his mind. He hurriedly filled his hands and hastened back to Dermot's side. He was too late. The mighty hero was dead.

They made preparations to take away the body for burial. But their help was not needed. The god, Angus, appeared and with him four shining heroes, bearing a golden bier. On this they placed the body of Dermot and walked majestically away.

"I cannot give him back his life," said Angus. "But I can take his body with me, and I can have his soul to keep me company."

Then all vanished in a blaze of light. Finn, Oscar and Ossian were left alone in the forest.

A few years after the death of Dermot the old trouble between the High King of Tara and the Fenians arose again. Cormack was dead, but his son was even more bitter against the army. He made up his mind that he would destroy the forces entirely.

The new ruler realized that he could never raise a sufficient force to meet the Fenians in battle. He determined upon a less dangerous, though less honorable, method. He endeavored to promote a quarrel between two factions, so that the groups would destroy themselves. The High King, you see, was a man of wisdom.

This plan was an easy one to accomplish. You have not forgotten that Gaul of Morna had held the leadership of the Fenians for the ten years between the death of Cool and the arrival of Finn. He had been loyal to Finn all through the later years, but beneath his loyalty ran a thin current of envy. He was the older man of the two. It was easy to tell him that, because of his age, he should be chief. Envy is a poison that works silently, but it works harder when it is thought about. The High King gradually convinced Gaul that it would be to his interest to quarrel with Finn and take part of the army with him.

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Finn's treatment of Dermot shows us that he became more revengeful in his later years. He did not take part in so many adventures requiring him to use his strength, so he had more time to think over what people had done to him. He never forgot that it was Gaul who had given his father his mortal wound. As long as Gaul was his faithful follower, he did not hold this fact against him. But when Gaul began to grow bitter in his dealings with his chief, Finn made the quarreling easy by recalling this fight. Both men were willing to come to blows.

The High King went with Gaul through the ranks of the Fenians and, by promises and bribes, won over a large number. The fact that the High King was on the side of Gaul made it appear to these men that those who were disloyal to Finn would probably be on the winning side. In the end, the two forces were about equal. Then the High King and Gaul moved to attack the forces of Finn.

Finn was sick at heart at the thought that his splendid army was to be cut to pieces by the treacherous plot of the High King. He would gladly have given up his command if that act would have saved the men from fighting among themselves. His knowledge, however, told him that it was the plan of the High King to get the two groups to so weaken themselves that he could gather a force large enough to defeat those left. Finn knew what Gaul did not understand, that he was to be used and later put out of the way.

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The forces of Gaul met those of Finn at Gowra, just at evening. In those days no one thought of fighting at night. The two forces built their camps and waited for morning light to give the signal for the combat.

All through the early hours of the night Finn paced his camp and tried to make a plan which would stop the struggle of the next day. If the High King had not been on the side of Gaul, he felt that the trouble would never have occurred. At midnight he left his own camp and went, alone, to the quarters of Gaul and the High King.

These two men were greatly alarmed to wake and find Finn beside them. Both sprang to their feet and seized their weapons. They thought that Finn meant to do away with them by treachery.

"Have no fear," said Finn. "I have come by myself, and my purpose is to talk, not fight. I have come to see if there is not some way in which we can stop the slaughter of the men of Erin."

Both men were silent. Finally Gaul spoke, "There is one way," he said. "You may give up the leadership and tell your men to obey me."

Finn turned to the High King. "If that will stop the struggle, then I will accept the terms."

The crafty High King was not pleased. A peace which would leave the Fenians as strong as ever was the last thing he wanted. He pretended to doubt Finn's word.

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"It is but a trick," he said to Gaul. "Finn would have us believe that he wants peace, so that he may attack us unawares. Tomorrow's contest shall decide all things which are at stake."

"Then I make one other proposition to you," said Finn, addressing the High King. "I will meet you in single combat tomorrow morning. If you best me, you will have a clear field to take my men as your followers. If I prove the better fighter, Gaul and I will be left to decide the leadership."

The High King had been whispering to some of his men near him. These went out into the darkness before he replied to the challenge.

"I refuse your challenge," he said, with an attempt to cover his fear with haughtiness. "It would not be fitting that an army leader should meet his king in a single combat."

"Then I can do no more," declared Finn. "I must go back and leave the decision to the morrow."

The High King laughed excitedly. "That you shall not do," he said. "Our men have been awakened and are between you and your camp. Tonight they will settle your claims for leadership; tomorrow your men will fight without you."

Finn looked at the forces, now awake and surrounding him. It was the basest kind of treachery. He turned to Gaul of Morna.

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"Gaul, you took the vow to be honorable in your dealings. Are you willing that I shall face your army, when I came in peace as a messenger? Are you a party to this treachery?"

"I am not!" cried Gaul. "Never shall it be said that Gaul of Morna knew not how to treat a messenger of the foe. I shall conduct you through our forces, and woe to any man who raises a spear against you!"

"I thank you, Gaul," said Finn.

Without even glancing at the High King, Finn followed Gaul out into the night. His guide escorted him to the edge of his own camp before turning to go back. Finn made a last appeal to him.

"It grieves me, Gaul, to see this battle take place. I know that the High King but uses you to cause the destruction of the Fenians. I pray you, give up the struggle and come back to us."

Gaul was deeply moved. "I fear you are right," he said. "But, right or wrong, I must go on. I have driven my game out into the open. I must capture it or lose the respect of my men."

Then Gaul went back to his camp.

## II.

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With the first streaks of morning light, the great battle of Gowra began. The men fought as only Fenians could fight against one another. Finn threw himself into the struggle with reckless bravery, but the late afternoon found him still unwounded. Many a splendid hero went down, Gaul of Morna among them. The High King, however, did not allow the fight to lag when his leader was killed. He took charge of the forces himself.

Finn tried all day to get his monarch into a combat with him, but the High King was too shrewd. He kept clear of any of the stronger fighters of Finn's forces. It was Oscar, wounded and tired, who finally cornered him and forced him to fight or show his cowardice.

Like a rat in a trap, the High King put up a desperate battle. He was fresh and strong, and so was almost a match for the wounded Oscar. The end came when both men sank to the ground at the same time. Before Finn could reach the side of his grandson, both men were dead.

Then Finn's mighty heart broke. He looked about the field, where small groups of men still struggled desperately. He determined that the contest should stop. He blew a loud blast on his horn. The men stopped in surprise. Finn's voice rang out over the field.

"Men of Erin," he called. "Sad am I that I have lived to see the day when brother fights against brother, friend against friend. Let the fighting cease. Gaul and the High King are dead, and Finn will soon be with you no longer. I care not to live to think over this useless conflict. From now on the Fenians will live only in song and story. Go back to the chase and the pursuits of peace. I command you never to draw sword again unless it be to protect Erin from a foreign foe."

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Then Finn called his servant and bade him bring to him the drinking horn from his camp. This horn he had carried with him all through his later years. It held the magic water which would bring sleep and forgetfulness to any who drank from it. When the horn was brought he drained it to the last drop. Then he bade farewell to his men, took his weapons with him and went into a cave on the hillside to await the sleep that was already stealing over his limbs.

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A thousand years rolled by. A new race of people took possession of Erin. Only from the lips of the poets and the bards could one hear of the mighty heroes. Some laugh and say the tales are not true. But the legend is still told among the Irish peasants that Finn still sleeps in his cave on the hill, and that if Ireland ever is invaded again, he will come out and gather his Fenians for battle.

THE END.

["guesed" changed to "guessed" on Page 25](#)  
["again" changed to "against" on Page 26](#)  
["frightened" changed to "frightened" on Page 26](#)  
["posible" changed to "possible" on Page 31](#)  
[" added on Page 31](#)  
["McCool" changed to "MacCool" on Page 35](#)  
["warior" changed to "warrior" on Page 52](#)  
["tuggling" changed to "tugging" on Page 61](#)  
["him" changed to "his" on Page 76](#)  
[corrected placement of quote on Page 76](#)  
[" added on Page 83](#)  
[" added on Page 94](#)  
["made" changed to "make" on Page 138](#)

but he never guessed  
thumb against the meat  
eyes frightened him  
feat be possible,  
youth," answered Conn.  
Thus Finn MacCool  
only a great warrior.  
tugging and straining  
He cleared his way  
castle. "You are at  
the king. "Finding  
lord of that castle."  
make them do their

Added period to regularize headings on Pages [12](#), [97](#), [107](#), [116](#), [119](#), [123](#), [130](#), [140](#), [144](#), and [160](#).  
Chapter 10 has no Section VIII. Section VII. begins on Page [89](#), and Section IX. begins on Page [97](#).

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