

The Hunt

An Irish Celtic Tale about Fianna Warriors adapted by Bluegrass Storyteller Chuck Larkin

Finn was on a hunt with Diarmuid of the Love-Spot, ah poor Diarmuid, just above his right eye, he had a spot that when a woman looked upon it, oh poor lass, she fell in love with Diarmuid. He took to wearing his hat tilted down over his right eye to cover the spot to gain some peace and thus began the tradition of young men over the centuries to our time to also tilt their hats over their right eye. Great Conan also was with Finn and Diarmuid. Conan was a giant of a warrior. If you passed Conan on a path and you carried a frown on your face that was your invitation to be punched on the nose by Conan or if a Lass left her door open while brewing a bark tea that was an invitation for Conan to drop in for a visit.

These great Irish Celtic heroes were Fianna warriors and to be of the Fianna, man or woman you had to pass great feats of athletic skill and courage and also you had to know twelve books of poetry by heart. Finn himself, he was well known in his day as a poet, aye that he was.

On this day of sport, soon after the rising of the sun, they spied a great white buck deer and began the chase to reach within a spear toss. As hard as they ran in turns none were able to close the gap for a spear toss. By mid day, they had left the wood and were on a wide flat moor. 'Twas late in the afternoon, it was, it was, when Finn called his companions to a halt. "See there to the west, a storm is brewing and moving this way. We'd best go back to the forest where we can find shelter and wood for a fire."

They did, they did turn back and after a bit as the shadows grew long, Conan spoke; "There to the left is that not a light, perhaps a cabin? Though I don't recall any living hereabouts. Should we not turn aside and see for ourselves?" "Aye," said the others.

And sure as it can be, it was a small dwelling they approached. On arrival Finn rapped on the door with the butt end of his long slender hunting spear.

From inside, they heard an old piddling wizened voice. "I hear you, I hear you, and I know who ye be! But 'fore I let ye in me cabin, I want your word you will act as perfect gentlemen or you will answer to me, aye, you will answer to me."

Finn with a huge grin on his face and a bit of a chuckle over the threat responded, "Aye you have our word, we will, we will be perfect gentlemen".

The door slowly opened. There in the fire light, stood a little man, heavy with the weight of age, long in gray hair, below his shoulders it was, it was and beard to his waist. "Come in, come in and sit there by the table", and in a squeaky voice, "remember to mind your manners."

Leaving their hunting spears outside by the door they entered, "Oh, we will, we will," politely and solemnly said the three. They looked about the cabin, not unusual, one other door and a little billy goat prancing about. The door opened and in came a young woman in glistening green attire and a wild head of red hair. "Well now, welcome to our home, I'll start a bit of dinner for us."

As she moved toward the fireplace, didn't Diarmuid himself stare and startled, sucked in a mighty huff of air. He was frozen motionless and could only follow her with his eyes. Diarmuid after a moment and a shudder reached up and whipped his hat off his head to uncover the love-spot. "Aye, Lass, you are so beautiful, so beautiful, your voice sings deep, deep, deep into my soul. I don't mean to be so froward but would you wed with me?"

And she turned toward Diarmuid, and looking him straight in the face said, “Nay, I would not! You knew me well before, and you did not treat me well, so speak no more this night to me.”

She turned to her chores as Diarmuid turned to Conan and Finn, “I don’t know her, do you?” They shook their heads and whispered, “Nay.”

The old man looked toward Finn, “Would you catch up me billy goat and tie him to the door jam?”

“Aye,” said Finn and he began.

Well did not that billy goat jump this way and that away, between Finn’s legs, under the table, around a chair, “Let me give you a hand Finn,” said Conan and soon all three were at trying to catch that billy goat and never did one lay a hand on him.

“Stop. Stop. Stop and sit down with ye before ye break something. Ah, one should never ask someone else to do something when they can do it for themselves.”

The old man walked over, caught the billy goat and tied him to the door jam with a bit of rope, he did, he did.

They all ate their supper and slept that night on the floor as a great howling storm raged about the cabin. At break of day they rose, ate some gruel and bread to break their fast.

The three took their leave and Finn thanked the old man for hosting them. After they stepped outside, to a bright sun rising but still well below the trees, Finn turned to the old man and said, “May I ask you two or three questions?”

“Sure, go ahead, I’ll try to answer, best as I can.”

“Well, what I don’t understand be this. Who was the lass last night that told Diarmuid he had known her well and had not treated her well? We all grew up in the same place and neither of us ever saw her before? And why were we not able to catch up, your billy goat, when you had no bother doing it. Last who are you, to threaten we three, the greatest of the Fianna warriors of this age? None of this do we understand?”

The old man grinned and answered, “Ah, the lass was Diarmuid himself, himself as he was as a youth, and when he was young he did not treat himself well. The billy goat is the world. No matter how hard you try, warriors will never control the world. Last, who am I to threaten you if you failed