

# THE CENTREFOLD STORY

## ANIMAL BRIDES

### 1. THE WOMAN WITH A PIG'S HEAD (Ireland)

There was a king in Tir na n-Og (the Land of Youth) who held the throne and crown for many a year against all comers. And the law of the kingdom was that every seventh year the champions and best men of the country should run for the office of king.

Once in seven years they all met at the front of the palace and ran to the top of a hill two miles distant. On the top of that hill was a chair, and the man that sat first in the chair was the King of Tir na n-Og for the next seven years. After he had ruled for ages, the king became anxious. He was afraid that someone might sit in the chair before him, and take the crown off his head. So he called up his Druid one day and asked, "How long shall I keep the chair to rule this land, and will any man sit in it before me and take the crown off my head?"

"You will keep the chair and the crown forever," said the Druid, "unless your own son-in-law takes them from you."

The king had no sons and but one daughter, the finest woman in Tir na n-Og; and the like of her could not be found in Erin or any kingdom in the world. When the king heard the words of the Druid, he said, "I'll have no son-in-law, for I'll put the daughter in a way no man will marry her."

Then he took a rod of Druidic spells, and calling the daughter up before him, he struck her with the rod, and put a pig's head on her in place of her own.

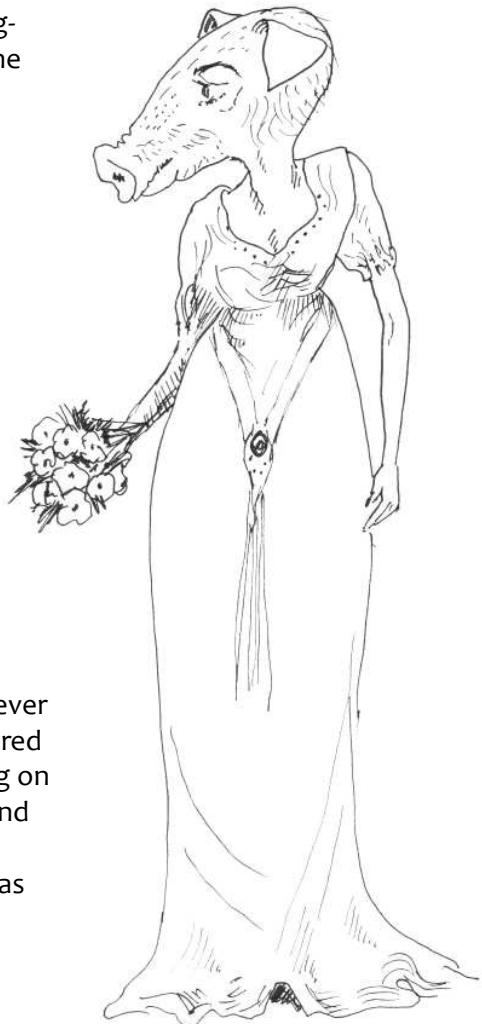
Then he sent the daughter away to her own place in the castle, and turning to the Druid said, "There is not man that will marry her now."

When the Druid saw the face that was on the princess with the pig's head that the father gave her, he grew very sorry that he had given such information to the king; and some time after he went to see the princess.

"Must I be in this was forever?" asked she of the Druid?

"You must," said he, "till you marry one of the sons of Fin MacCumhail in Erin. If you marry one of Fin's sons, you'll be freed from the blot that is on you now, and get back your own head and countenance."

When she heard this she was impatient in her mind, and could never rest till she left Tir na n-Og and came to Erin. When she had inquired she heard that Fin and the Fenians of Erin were at that time living on Knock an Ar, and she made her way to the place without delay and lived there a while. And when she saw Oisin, he pleased her; and when she found out that he was a son of Fin MacCumhail, she was always making up to him and coming towards him. And it was usual for the Fenians in those days to go out hunting on the hills and mountains and in the woods of Erin, and when one of



them went he always took five or six men with him to bring home the game.

On a day Oisin set out with his men and dogs to the woods; and he went so far and killed so much game that when it was brought together, the men were so tired, weak, and hungry that they couldn't carry it, but went away home and left him with the three dogs, Bran, Sciolán, and Buglén, to shift for himself.

Now the daughter of the king of Tir na n-Og, who was herself the Queen of Youth, followed closely in the hunt all that day, and when the men left Oisin she came up to him. And as he stood looking at the great pile of game and said, "I am very sorry to leave behind anything that I've had the trouble of killing," she looked at him and said, "Tie up a bundle for me, and I'll carry it to lighten the load off you." Oisin gave her a bundle of the game to carry, and took the remainder himself. The evening was very warm and the game heavy, and after they had gone some distance, Oisin said, "Let us rest a while." Both threw down their burdens and put their backs against a great stone that was by the roadside. The woman was heated and out of breath, and opened her dress to cool herself. Then Oisin looked at her and saw her beautiful form and her white bosom.

"Oh, then," said he, "it's a pity you have the pig's head on you, for I have never seen such an appearance on a woman in all my life before."

"Well," said she, "my father is the King of Tir na n-Og, and I was the finest woman in his kingdom and the most beautiful of all, till he put me under a Druidic spell and gave me the pig's head that's on me now in place of my own. And the Druid of Tir na n-Og came to me afterwards and told me that if one of the sons of Fin MacCumhail would marry me, the pig's head would vanish, and I should get back my face in the same form as it was before my father struck me with the Druid's wand. When I heard this I never stopped till I came to Erin, where I found your father and picked you out among the sons of Fin MacCumhail, and followed you to see would you marry me and set me free."

"If that is the state you are in, and if marriage with me will free you from the spell, I'll not leave the pig's head on you long."

So they got married without delay, not waiting to take home the game or to lift it from the ground. That moment the pig's head was gone, and the king's daughter had the same face and beauty that she had before her father struck her with the Druidic wand.

"Now," said the Queen of Youth to Oisin, "I cannot stay here long, and unless you come with me to Tir na n-Og we must part."

"Oh," said Oisin, "wherever you go I'll go, and wherever you turn I'll follow."

Then she turned, and Oisin went with her, not going back to Knock an Ar to see his father or his son. That very day they set out for Tir na n-Og and never stopped till they came to her father's castle. And when they came, there was a welcome before them, for the king thought his daughter was lost. That same year there was to be a choice of a king, and when the appointed day came at the end of the seventh year, all the great men and the champions, and the king himself, met together at the front of the castle to run and see who should be first in the chair on the hill. But before a man of them was halfway to the hill, Oisin was sitting above in the chair before them.

After that time no one stood up to run for the office against Oisin, and he spent many a happy years as king in Tir na n-Og.

Source: Jeremiah Curtin, *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland* (Little, Brown, and Company, Boston 1890)

I like that as a story. It fits in with a lot of Victorian theory about folklore and customs—Fraser's Golden Bough etc. He mentions races to chose the king although whether it actually happened outside folktales I'm not sure. There's a lovely Irish lilt to the language too, you can hear the accent in your head.