

LADY GREGORY

on the mountain of Beinn Gulbain, and they heard a great outcry among the hounds, that they ran into some narrow place. And when they followed them there, they saw the hounds of Finn in a ring, and they keeping back the other hounds, and in the middle of the ring was a young boy, with high looks, and he naked and having long hair. And he was no way daunted by the noise of the hounds, and did not look at them at all, but at the men that were coming up. And as soon as the fight was stopped Bran and Sceolan went up to the little lad, and whined and licked him, that any one would think they had forgotten their master. Finn and the others came up to him then, and put their hands on his head, and made much of him. And they brought him to their own hunting cabin, and he ate and drank with them, and before long he lost his wildness and was the same as themselves. And as to Bran and Sceolan, they were never tired playing about him.

And it is what Finn thought, there was some look of Sadbh in his face, and that it might be he was her son, and he kept him always beside him. And little by little when the boy had learned their talk, he told them all he could remember. He used to be with a deer he loved very much, he said, and that cared and sheltered him, and it was in a wide place they used to be, having hills and valleys and streams and woods in it, but that was shut in with high cliffs on every side, that there was no way of escape from it. And he used to be eating fruits and roots in the summer, and in the winter there was food left for him in the shelter of a cave. And a dark-looking man used to be coming to the place, and sometimes he would speak to the deer softly and gently, and sometimes with a loud angry voice. But whatever way he spoke, she would always draw away from him with the appearance of great dread on her, and the man would go away in great anger. And the last time he saw the deer, his mother, the dark man was speaking to her for a long time, from softness to anger. And at the end he struck her with a hazel rod, and with that she was forced to follow him, and she looking back all the while at the child, and crying after him that any one would pity her. And he tried hard to follow after her, and made every attempt, and cried out with grief and rage, but he had no power to move, and when he could hear his mother no more he fell on the grass and his wits went from him. And when he awoke it is on the side of the hill he was, where the hounds found him. And he searched a long time for the place where he was brought up, but he could not find it.

And the name the Fianna gave him was Oisín, and it is he was their maker of poems, and their good fighter afterwards.

CHAPTER V

The Best Men of the Fianna

And while Oisín was in his young youth, Finn had other good men along with him, and the best of them were Goll, son of Morna, and Caoilte, son of Ronan, and Lugaidh's Son.

As to Goll, that was of Connacht, he was very tall and light-haired, and some say he was the strongest of all the Fianna. Finn made a poem in praise of him one time when some stranger was asking what sort he was, saying how hardy he was and brave in battle, and as strong as a hound or as the waves, and with all that so kind and so gentle, and open-handed and sweet-voiced, and faithful to his friends.

And the chessboard he had was called the Solustairtech, the Shining Thing, and some of the chessmen were made of gold, and some of them of silver, and each one of them was as big as the fist of the biggest man of the Fianna; and after the death of Goll it was buried in Slieve Baune.

And as to Caoilte, that was a grey thin man, he was the best runner of them all. And he did a good many great deeds; a big man of the Fomor he killed one time, and he killed a five-headed giant in a wheeling door, and another time he made an end of an enchanted boar that no one else could get near, and he killed a grey stag that had got away from the Fianna through twenty-seven years. And another time he brought Finn out of Teamhair, where he was kept by force by the High King, because of some rebellion the Fianna had stirred up. And when Caoilte heard Finn had been brought away to Teamhair, he went out to avenge him. And the first he killed was Cuireach, a king of Leinster that had a great name, and he brought his head up to the hill that is above Buadhmaic. And after that he made a great rout through Ireland, bringing sorrow into every house for the sake of Finn, killing a man in every place, and killing the calves with the cows.

And every door the red wind from the east blew on, he would throw it open, and go in and destroy all before him, setting fire to the fields, and giving the wife of one man to another.

And when he came to Teamhair, he came to the palace, and took the clothes off the door-keeper, and he left his own sword that was worn thin in the king's sheath, and took the king's sword that had great power in it. And he went into the palace then in the disguise of a servant, to see how he could best free Finn.

And when evening came Caoilte held the candle at the king's feast in the great hall, and after a while the king said: "You will wonder at what I tell you, Finn, that the two eyes of Caoilte are in my candlestick." "Do not say that," said Finn, "and do not put reproach on my people although I myself am your prisoner;

Caoilte," he said, "that is not the way with him, for it is a high mind he has, and he only does high deeds, and he would not stand serving with a candle for the gold of the whole world."

After that Caoilte was serving the King of Ireland with drink, and when he was standing beside him he gave out a high sorrowful lament. "There is the smell of Caoilte's skin on that lament," said the king. And when Caoilte saw he knew him he spoke out and he said: "Tell me what way I can get freedom for my master." "There is no way to get freedom for him but by doing one thing," said the king, "and that is a thing you can never do. If you can bring me together a couple of all the wild creatures of Ireland," he said, "I will give up your master to you then."

When Caoilte heard him say that he made no delay, but he set out from Teamhair, and went through the whole of Ireland to do that work for the sake of Finn. It is with the flocks of birds he began, though they were scattered in every part, and from them he went on to the beasts. And he gathered together two of every sort, two ravens from Fiodh da Bheann; two wild ducks from Loch na Seibin; two foxes from Slieve Cuilinn; two wild oxen from Burren; two swans from blue Dobhran; two owls from the wood of Faradhruim; two polecats from the branchy wood on the side of Druim da Raoin, the Ridge of the Victories; two gulls from the strand of Loch Leith; four woodpeckers from white Brosna; two plovers from Carraigh Dhain; two thrushes from Leith Lomard; two wrens from Dun Aoibh; two herons from Corrain Cleibh; two eagles from Carraig of the stones; two hawks from Fiodh Chonnach; two sows from Loch Meilghe; two water-hens from Loch Erne; two moor-hens from Monadh Maith; two sparrow-hawks from Dubhloch; two stonechats from Magh Cuilleann; two tomtits from Magh Tuallainn; two swallows from Sean Abhla; two cormorants from Ath Cliath; two wolves from Broit Cliathach; two blackbirds from the Strand of the Two Women; two roebucks from Luachair Ire; two pigeons from Ceas Chuir; two nightingales from Leiter Ruadh; two starlings from green-sided Teamhair; two rabbits from Sith Dubh Donn; two wild pigs from Cluaidh Chuir; two cuckoos from Drom Daibh; two lapwings from Leanain na Furraich; two woodcocks from Craobh Ruadh; two hawks from the Bright Mountain; two grey mice from Luimneach; two otters from the Boinn; two larks from the Great Bog; two bats from the Cave of the Nuts; two badgers from the province of Ulster; two landrail from the banks of the Sionnan; two wagtails from Port Lairrge; two curlews from the harbour of Gallimh; two hares from Muirthemne; two deer from Sith Buidhe; two peacocks from Magh Mell; two cormorants from Ath Cliath; two eels from Duth Dur; two goldfinches from Slieve na-n Eun; two birds of slaughter from Magh Bhuilg; two bright swallows from Granard; two redbreasts from the Great Wood; two rock-cod from Cala Chairge; two sea-pigs from the great sea; two wrens from Mios an Chuil; two salmon from Eas Mhic Muirne; two clean dogs from Gleann na Smoil; two cows from Magh Mor; two cats from the Cave of

Cruachan; two sheep from bright Sidhe Diobhlain; two pigs of the pigs of the son of Lir; a ram and a crimson sheep from Innis.

And along with all these he brought ten hounds of the hounds of the Fianna, and a horse and a mare of the beautiful horses of Manannan.

And when Caoilte had gathered all these, he brought them to the one place. But when he tried to keep them together, they scattered here and there from him; the raven went away southward, and that vexed him greatly, but he overtook it again in Gleann da Bheann, beside Loch Lurcan. And then his wild duck went away from him, and it was not easy to get it again, but he followed it through every stream to grey Accuill till he took it by the neck and brought it back, and it no way willing.

And indeed through the length of his life Caoilte remembered well all he went through that time with the birds, big and little, travelling over hills and ditches and striving to bring them with him, that he might set Finn his master free.

And when he came to Teamhair he had more to go through yet, for the king would not let him bring them in before morning, but gave him a house having nine doors in it to put them up in for the night. And no sooner were they put in than they raised a loud screech all together, for a little ray of light was coming to them through fifty openings, and they were trying to make their escape. And if they were not easy in the house, Caoilte was not easy outside it, watching every door till the rising of the sun on the morrow.

And when he brought out his troop, the name the people gave them was "Caoilte's Rabble," and there was no wonder at all in that.

But all the profit the King of Ireland got from them was to see them together for that one time. For no sooner did Finn get his freedom than the whole of them scattered here and there, and no two of them went by the same road out of Teamhair.

And that was one of the best things Caoilte, son of Ronan, ever did. And another time he ran from the wave of Clidna in the south to the wave of Rudraige in the north. And Colla his son was a very good runner too, and one time he ran a race backwards against the three battalions of the Fianna for a chessboard. And he won the race, but if he did, he went backward over Beinn Eclair into the sea.

And very good hearing Caoilte had. One time he heard the King of the Luigne of Connacht at his hunting, and Blathmec that was with him said, "What is that hunt, Caoilte?" "A hunt of three packs of hounds," he said, "and three sorts of wild creatures before them. The first hunt," he said, "is after stags and large deer and the second hunt is after swift small hares, and the third is a furious hunt after heavy boars." "And what is the fourth hunt, Caoilte?" said Blathmec. "It is the hunting of heavy-sided, low-bellied badgers." And then they heard coming after the hunt the shouts of the lads and of the readiest of the men and the serving-men

LADY GREGORY

do not beat at carrying burdens. And Blathmec went out to see the hunting, and he had told him, that was the way it was.

He understood the use of herbs, and one time he met with two women that were very downhearted because their husbands had gone from them to take other wives. And Caoilte gave them Druid herbs, and they put them in the water of a bath and washed in it, and the love of their husbands came back to them, and they sent away the new wives they had taken.

And as to Lugaidh's Son, that was of Finn's blood, and another of the best men of the Fianna, he was put into Finn's arms as a child, and he was reared up by Duban's daughter, that had reared eight hundred fighting men of the Fianna, till his twelfth year, and then she gave him all he wanted of arms and of armour, and he went to Chorraig Conluain and the mountains of Slieve Bladhma, where Finn and the Fianna were at that time.

And Finn gave him a very gentle welcome, and he struck his hand in Finn's hand, and made his agreement of service with him. And he stopped through the length of a year with the Fianna; but he was someway sluggish through all that time, so that under his leading not more than nine of the Fianna got to kill so much as a boar or a deer. And along with that, he used to beat both his servants and his hounds.

And at last the three battalions of the Fianna went to where Finn was, at the Point of the Fianna on the edge of Loch Lein, and they made their complaint against Lugaidh's Son, and it is what they said: "Make your choice now, will you have us with you, or will you have Lugaidh's Son by himself."

Then Lugaidh's Son came to Finn, and Finn asked him, "What is it has put the whole of the Fianna against you?" "By my word," said the lad, "I do not know the reason, unless it might be they do not like me to be doing my feats and casting my spears among them."

Then Finn gave him an advice, and it is what he said: "If you have a mind to be a good champion, be quiet in a great man's house; be surly in the narrow pass. Do not beat your hound without a cause; do not bring a charge against your wife without having knowledge of her guilt; do not hurt a fool in fighting, for he is without his wits. Do not find fault with high-up persons; do not stand up to take part in a quarrel; have no dealings with a bad man or a foolish man. Let two-thirds of your gentleness be showed to women and to little children that are creeping on the floor, and to men of learning that make the poems, and do not be rough with the common people. Do not give your reverence to all; do not be ready to have one bed with your companions. Do not threaten or speak big words, for it is a shameful thing to speak stiffly unless you can carry it out afterwards. Do not forsake your lord so long as you live; do not give up any man that puts himself under your protection for all the treasures of the world. Do not speak against others to their lord, that is not work for a good man. Do not be a bearer of lying

GODS AND FIGHTING MEN

stories, or a tale-bearer that is always chattering. Do not be talking too much; do not find fault hastily; however brave you may be, do not raise factions against you. Do not be going to drinking-houses, or finding fault with old men; do not meddle with low people; this is right conduct I am telling you. Do not refuse to share your meat; do not have a niggard for your friend; do not force yourself on a great man or give him occasion to speak against you. Hold fast to your arms till the hard fight is well ended. Do not give up your opportunity, but with that follow after gentleness."

That was good advice Finn gave, and he was well able to do that; for it was said of him that he had all the wisdom of a little child that is busy about the house, and the mother herself not understanding what he is doing; and that is the time she has most pride in him.

And as to Lugaidh's Son, that advice stayed always with him, and he changed his ways, and after a while he got a great name among the poets of Ireland and of Alban, and whenever they would praise Finn in their poems, they would praise him as well.

And Aoife, daughter of the King of Lochlann, that was married to Mal, son of Aiel, King of Alban, heard the great praise the poets were giving to Lugaidh's Son, and she set her love on him for the sake of those stories.

And one time Mal her husband and his young men went hunting to Slieve-mor-Monaigh in the north of Alban. And when he was gone Aoife made a plan in her sunny house where she was, to go over to Ireland, herself and her nine foster-sisters. And they set out and went over the manes of the sea till they came to Beinn Edair, and there they landed.

And it chanced on that day there was a hunting going on, from Slieve Bladhma to Beinn Edair. And Finn was in his hunting seat, and his fosterling, brown-haired Duibhruinn, beside him. And the little lad was looking about him on every side, and he saw a ship coming to the strand, and a queen with modest looks in the ship, and nine women along with her. They landed then, and they came up to where Finn was, bringing every sort of present with them, and Aoife sat down beside him. And Finn asked news of her, and she told him the whole story, and how she had given her love to Lugaidh's Son, and was come over the sea looking for him; and Finn made her welcome.

And when the hunting was over, the chief men of the Fianna came back to where Finn was, and every one asked who was the queen that was with him. And Finn told them her name, and what it was brought her to Ireland. "We welcome her that made that journey," said they all; "for there is not in Ireland or in Alban a better man than the man she is come looking for, unless Finn himself."

And as to Lugaidh's Son, it was on the far side of Slieve Bladhma he was hunting that day, and he was the last to come in. And he went into Finn's tent, and when he saw the woman beside him he questioned Finn the same as the others had done, and Finn told him the whole story. "And it is to you she is come," he said;

LADY GREGORY

"... she is to you out of my hand, and all the war and the battles she brings
... it will not fall heavier on you," he said, "than on the rest of the
Fianna."

And she was with Lugaidh's Son a month and a year without being asked for.
But one day the three battalions of the Fianna were on the Hill of the Poet in
Leinster, and they saw three armed battalions equal to themselves coming, against
them, and they asked who was bringing them. "It is Mal, son of Aiel, is bringing
them," said Finn, "to avenge his wife on the Fianna. And it is a good time they are
come," he said, "when we are gathered together at the one spot."

Then the two armies went towards one another, and Mal, son of Aiel, took hold
of his arms, and three times he broke through the Fianna, and every time a
hundred fell by him. And in the middle of the battle he and Lugaidh's Son met,
and they fought against one another with spear and sword. And whether the fight
was short or long, it was Mal fell by Lugaidh's Son at the last.

And Aoife stood on a hill near by, as long as the battle lasted. And from that out
she belonged to Lugaidh's Son, and was a mother of children to him.

BOOK II

Finn's Helpers



CHAPTER I

The Lad of the Skins

Besides all the men Finn had in his household, there were some that would come
and join him from one place or another.

One time a young man wearing a dress of skins came to Finn's house at
Almhuin, and his wife along with him, and he asked to take service with Finn.

And in the morning, as they were going to their hunting, the Lad of the Skins
said to Finn: "Let me have no one with me but myself, and let me go into one part
of the country by myself, and you yourself with all your men go to another
part." "Is it on the dry ridges you will go," said Finn, "or is it in the deep bogs and
marshes, where there is danger of drowning?" "I will go in the deep boggy
places," said he.

So they all went out from Almhuin, Finn and the Fianna to one part, and the
Lad of the Skins to another part, and they hunted through the day. And when they
came back at evening, the Lad of the Skins had killed more than Finn and all his
men together.

When Finn saw that, he was glad to have so good a servant. But Conan said to
him: "The Lad of the Skins will destroy ourselves and the whole of the Fianna of
Ireland unless you will find some way to rid yourself of him." "I never had a good
man with me yet, Conan," said Finn, "but you wanted me to put him away; and
how could I put away a man like that?" he said. "The way to put him away," said
Conan, "is to send him to the King of the Floods to take from him the great
cauldron that is never without meat, but that has always enough in it to feed the
whole world. And let him bring that cauldron back here with him to Almhuin,"
he said.

So Finn called to the Lad of the Skins, and he said: "Go from me now to the
King of the Floods and get the great cauldron that is never empty from him, and
bring it here to me." "So long as I am in your service I must do your work," said
the Lad of the Skins. With that he set out, leaping over the hills and valleys till he
came to the shore of the sea. And then he took up two sticks and put one of them