



The Sword of Lir

(Continued from page 9)

laughter and the patter of light footsteps over the crisp, wet sand.

Very cautiously he drew himself to his feet and peered round the rock behind which he had been sleeping. Yes, there they were, the white-armed children of Manannan, intent upon their play. Lightly they danced along the shore, their swift feet plashing through the little pools that the tide had left behind, sending the bright drops flying through the air in a myriad tiny rainbows. With waving of arms and tossing of golden tresses they danced, and the air was full of their silvery laughter. Tall they were and slender, with long white fingers and eyes that were blue and cold as the deepest depth of ocean. Their hair was twined with glistening sprays of sea-weed, and each upon her bosom wore one great, misty pearl, like a drop of sea-water frozen into stone.

Presently one of the sea-maids, weary of her sport, sank upon the sand not far from the rock where Flann was hidden, while the others danced away along the shore in long swaying lines. She sat there quietly, gazing out across the sea with wide blue eyes, and Flann knew that at last his chance had come. With one swift movement he sprang from behind the rock and even as she rose with a little cry of bewilderment and alarm, his arms were round her and he held her fast. There was a breath of damp wind on his cheek, a stinging dash of salt water in his eyes, forcing him to close them for an instant, and when he opened them again he saw, far out across the heaving waves, a wild confusion of beating wings and feathery breasts vanishing into the foam. The broad stretches of beach lay bare and empty, and in his hands a white sea-gull fluttered, screaming and struggling to be free.

For a moment, Flann gazed at it in bewilderment, and then the bird was gone and his fingers clasped the cold, slimy skin of a great serpent, that reared its head and hissed angrily in his face, coiling about his arm as if to strike. Flann felt a cold chill of terror creeping over him, but he tightened his grasp upon the writhing body, holding it firmly to him in spite of its efforts to escape. Again and again the shape that he was holding changed. Now he was clasping the slippery form of a monster sea-lion; now a huge black dog struggled and snarled in his grasp; or a flame that had no heat in it licked around his hands—but through it all he remembered the stranger's words: "Let you not loose your hold for one minute, or the sword will be lost to you forever"—and he held fast. At last he found himself once more standing with his arms wound about the slim body of the sea-girl, who looked up at him with wide frightened eyes, and waited, shivering, for him to speak.

Flann's heart gave a throb of pity as he saw the fear in her face, but he remembered how much hung upon her answer to his questions and hardened it again, though his voice was very gentle as he spoke.

"Let you not be fearing me, O Daughter of Manannan," he said, "for indeed it is no harm I would be doing you, but only seeking to know the secret that you guard."

"And why would you be knowing the secret of the sea, O Mortal?" asked the girl. Her voice was low and sweet, with a little murmurous sound in it like the ripple of running water, but her hand lay cold in Flann's warm one and her eyes were as chill and grey as the winter sea. The lad smiled down on her, still holding her fast.

"I would learn how to win the sword of Lir," he answered, "the way I might slay the black, bad-tempered giant and free my mother from her captivity."

The look of fear vanished from the sea-maiden's face. She laughed, a little low note of laughter. "It is long the way that you must go ere you win to that," she said. "And it is dangers and trials a-many that lie before you. Yet it may be that you will win through them all."

She lifted the great, shimmering pearl that hung upon her breast and laid it in the boy's hand.

"Let you be keeping this," she went on, "and be minding not to lose it. When you are in danger or trouble look into its depths, and there you will find counsel and help. And now let you be going to Iasgaire the Fisherman, whose hut lies

under the shadow of Carraig Dhu. From him you must learn all the lore of the sea—how to hoist sail and steer and pull at the oar—for you are landward bred. When you have learned it, you must beg of him his boat that is called Faioilean, the Sea-gull and in it put forth across the waters to where the rain-washed cliffs of Hy Breasil lift their heads above the grey waves of the west. There you will find the caverns of Lir and, it may be, win to the sword."

Flann took the pearl from the little, cold hand that held it out to him and looked down at it for a moment, wondering at its beauty as it gleamed between his brown fingers. When he lifted his eyes again, the sea-maid was gone. Only a lone white gull wheeled and swooped above the blue, sunlit waters.

The lad stood watching it until it vanished into the pearly haze that veiled the horizon. Then he turned and set his face to where the black mass of Carraig Dhu stood out sullen and threatening against the noonday sky. But although it was full noon when he left the mouth of the Liffey, evening was drawing down once more when he at last reached the hut of Iasgaire the Fisherman. It stood beneath the shadow of the great rock, where the coarse bents and sea-poppies grew along the sand dunes. Around its low grey walls and roof thatched with sea-weed, blew all the winds of heaven and the air was heavy and salt with drifting scud.

Iasgaire stood in the doorway, looking out across the grey backs of the dunes to where the billows broke upon the margin in long lines of foam. Tall he was and white-haired, with bushy eyebrows from beneath which his eyes looked out, a frosty blue, puckered round the corners into a million wrinkles by years of gazing across the waters through sun and wind and salt sea-mist. He turned those keen eyes upon the lad's face.

"Welcome, O stranger," he said. "What seek you of Iasgaire the Fisherman, whom few seek nowadays?"

Flann told his story, showing the pearl the sea-maiden had given him, and Iasgaire listened in silence until the tale was ended, nodding his head slowly as he heard.

"That would be Oonagh, youngest daughter of Manannan," he said, holding out a broad, horny palm to the lad standing before him. "It is she that is the fairest and kindest of the Children of Lir. Let you be listening to me now, lad," he continued. "It is myself that will be knowing all the secrets of the sea, for it is long I have dwelt with it and well that I have loved it. Grey dawn and golden evening have I known it; in calm and in storm have I ridden its waves, and sun and wind and fog have whispered to me their mysteries. But youth is impatient and the lesson will be long in learning. What say you, lad, do you still wish to learn it?"

Flann's grey eyes met the blue ones steadily.

"It is long the time that my mother weeps in captivity," he said slowly. "And I would learn that lesson, O Iasgaire, if you will teach it."

Iasgaire laid a hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"By the beard of Lir, who is Ruler of the Seas, all that I can teach you, you shall know, O Flann MacEochy," he answered with a great laugh.

SO Flann, Prince of Dara, became pupil of Iasgaire the Fisherman, and for three years he served him, laboring at the oar, and learning slowly all the secrets of the sea. But when at last the three years were over, upon a day Iasgaire called the lad to him and stood for a moment looking at him in silence.

When first Flann had come to the little house below the shadow of Carraig Dhu, the old fisherman had stooped from his height to gaze upon the lad, but now blue eyes and grey were on a level, so greatly he had grown in the sea air and sunshine. At last Iasgaire spoke.

"The time has come, Prince Flann, when you must go upon your way once more. It is long and hard the lesson has been to learn, but well and truly you have learned it. To-morrow you shall take my Faioilean and set out across the waters to the west, the way you may be finding the sword of Lir and freeing your mother from captivity."

(To be continued)



FAIRY SOAP

DO you, too, enjoy the refreshment of the pure, floating, oval cake? How freely it lathers—how agreeably it cleanses! Fairy Soap adds real pleasure to toilet and bath.

THE N.K. FAIRBANK COMPANY
LIMITED, MONTREAL



"Have you a little Fairy in your home?"

SAVE

FOR OUR



LICENSE NOS.
FLOUR 15, 16, 17, 18
CEREAL 2-009

FOOD

ALLIES

BAKE YOUR BREAD CAKE AND PASTRY

FROM

PURITY OATS

WHEAT-SAVING RECIPES MAILED FREE

Western Canada Flour Mills, Co. Limited
Head Office • • • Toronto

34

\$1.00 AN HOUR FOR YOUR SPARE TIME

You can earn this looking after renewals and new subscriptions to EVERYWOMAN'S WORLD in your own neighborhood. Write for our monthly salary and commission plan.

Continental Publishing Company, Limited - Toronto, Canada