

The Leprechaun of Slieve Dearg

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Illustrated by EMILY HAND

his burrow, but as he watched, he caught it again and then he heard a tiny voice speaking.

"Wirra, wirra!" it was saying. "And what'll I do at all, at all? 'Tis the death of me she'll be!"

Michael was a little startled, but he could not be frightened at so small a sound, for indeed it seemed no louder than the chirp of a grasshopper. He crept down from his seat and stealing around the great stone, looked carefully through the gorse-bushes that grew by its side.

What he saw was a little, wizened old man in a tiny pointed cap of bright red and breeches of brown leather. A small green jacket lay on the rock beside the extraordinary figure and on it were carefully placed a cobbler's awl and needle and some bits of crimson leather.

"Sure, it's a leprechaun," whispered Michael to himself, "but whatever is it he does be doing there?"

And he might well ask, for the little man was lying on his face on the ground, trying, so it seemed to Michael, to poke himself down into a crack between two rocks, but small as he was, the crevice was too narrow for him.

Michael watched him in silence for some minutes. "Maybe I could make it larger for the crature," he said, to himself as he thought. But in his excitement and interest he had spoken louder than he knew, and the leprechaun turned round angrily.

"And what are you doing here, Michael Connor?" he asked. "Spying upon my business like this. Be off with you now, and bad luck to you for the ill-mannered gossoon that you are."

"Now I wonder how he knows my name?" thought Michael. But he took off his cap and bowed low, for everyone knows that it is well to keep on the good side of the Fairy folk, though indeed the Irish fairies are a kindly and good-humored race, as a rule, and neither so malicious nor so mischievous as their brothers of Scotland.

"Sure, I meant no harm, your Honour," he said. "I come up here, times to get away from the noise of the others, but indade it was not spying on you I intended. I'll be going now," he concluded and turned away, but the leprechaun stopped him, with a wave of one tiny hand.

"It's sorry I am if I hurt your feelings," he said, "but I'm bothered entirely just now. Maybe you could help me though," he added, his face brightening a little. "And if you do, sure you'll never repent it."

"If there's anything I can do for your Honour," replied Michael, "'tis proud and glad I'll be to do it."

"Hould your whist, then, and listen to me," responded the little old man, "I came up here this evening, thinking it would be cool and quiet and I could do my work undisturbed, for it's myself is the Queen's cobbler, and it was a pair of new shoes she did be wanting for the great ball to-morrow night, when the Fairy Host of Munster does be coming a-visiting. But just as I had got them finished and laid them down on the rock forinst me, if I didn't hit one of them a kick with my foot and knock it down into that crack there and though I've been trying for the last hour to reach it, sorrow a bit of me can. Queen Maeve'll be the death of me if I go

home without it. 'Tis herself has a fine temper of her own. And why shouldn't she, seeing she's the Ruler of all the Fairies in Ireland."

He paused, out of breath after his long speech, and Michael knelt beside the crack in the rock and tried to look down into it. Sure enough, right at the bottom he could see something lying—something that gleamed and sparkled in the dark cavity as if made of solid sunshine. But though he stretched his arm to its farthest, he could not reach it.

HOWEVER, he was not to be beaten thus, but took out his knife, which his big brother Tim had brought him from Dublin the Christmas Eve that was last gone by, and proceeded to cut a stout branch from one of the gorse bushes close at hand, though he scratched himself sorely with its prickles as he did so. With this he fished about in the crevice, until at last, after many unavailing efforts, he succeeded in securing and lifting out upon the point of his stick a small shoe of red leather, embroidered all over with gold and shining stones.

Michael had never seen anything one-half so beautiful in all his short life, but he had small time to gaze upon it, for with a shout of delight the leprechaun pounced on it and thrust it into a little bag that hung from his belt. Then picking up his tools and his coat he turned to the lad who stood looking at him somewhat blankly.

"It's much obliged to you that I am, Michael Connor," he said, "and if ever you are in need of a friend just come to me and if it is in the power of the Good Folk of Ireland to help you, helped you'll be."

"Thanks, your Honour," replied the boy, "but where would I be finding you, and how comes it that you know my name so well, seeing that it's myself never set eyes on you before to-night?"

The Queen's Cobbler laughed. "Faith, it's little there is that the People of the Hills do *not* know," he replied. "But mind me now, lad, if it's help you are seeking at any time just cut a switch of hazel and come you up here and knock three knocks with it upon the smallest of the three rocks there, and you'll get your answer. But now I must be getting home, and never be attempting to follow me, for that same would be the height of ill manners."

With that, he leaped down from the stone on which he was standing, and before Michael could open his mouth to assure him that he had no intention of following him, he was lost to sight among the shadows that were rapidly drawing down upon the mountain-side. The boy lingered for a few minutes watching the strange and fantastic shapes that the hawthorn and gorse and bracken clumps assumed as the darkness gathered. Then he made his way quick'y

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"And what are you doing here, Michael Connor? Spying upon my business like this. Be off with you now, bad luck to you."



T WAS Christmas Eve—and such a snowy, blowy Canadian Christmas as had not been known for many a long year. All day long the wind had been whirling the thickly falling flakes into mounds and drifts and miniature mountain ranges. All day long the children had been out of doors, snowballing, digging

and tunnelling through the soft masses, but now night had fallen and they were all gathered round the big fire in the living-room, chattering, laughing and discussing the joys that the morrow would bring forth. At last, however, the talk died away in little spasmodic gurgles and eddies, and they sat quietly watching the leaping flames and the little swirls of sparks that went dancing up the chimney.

"Tell us a story, Uncle Felix," said Kathleen, the eldest of the group, to a tall, elderly gentleman who sat among them.

There was a universal shout. "Oh, a story, a story! Uncle Felix is going to tell us a story!"

Their uncle laughed. "Nonsense, children! You have heard all my stories ages ago. You must be tired of them by now," he said.

"No, no, indeed we are not," came the instant response.

"Tell us about the King of Erin's Son," suggested Eric, the second in age. "I do like the dragon."

"—Or the Pooka."

"—Or the Cluricaun's Ride."

"Or Coppailleen Dearg," cried other voices.

But Uncle Felix shook his head at them all.

"I remember an old story which I do not think you have ever heard," he said. "My grandfather used to tell it to me when I was a boy." And without further prelude he told them the story of "The Leprechaun of Slieve Dearg."

ONCE upon a time, high up on the sides of Slieve Dearg, lived a little lad whose name was Michael. Now Slieve Dearg is the fair and wonderful mountain that lies just behind the City of Dublin, and from the little sod-roofed cottage where Michael lived, he could see the smoke curling above the city roofs and could look out past those roofs to where the blue waters of the Irish channel sparkled and tossed in the wind.

It was a happy life that he led, upon the whole, though our Canadian children of to-day would look upon it as a very poverty-stricken and miserable existence. For Michael was the youngest of many children and his father was a poor man—so poor that very often Michael's only meal during the day consisted of "potatoes and point," which means that his people could not even afford to have salt with their potatoes, but pointed to the place where it should be and tried to imagine that they tasted it.

Still, the children were all healthy enough, and ran and scrambled and laughed and shouted among the rocks and heather, as happy children have done in all ages.

Sometimes, however, Michael grew tired of all the noise and laughter and in the evening, when his work was done, he was very fond of leaving his brothers and sisters playing at their games without him, while he went scrambling up the mountain-side until he reached the three great rocks upon its summit.

Here he would sit, while the sunset filled the sky with shades of ruby and gold and malachite; or the stars gleamed out in the soft blue spaces above him; or the moon raced through the silver clouds like a ship upon a windy sea. Then at last, he would rise from his seat among the gorse-blossoms and go slowly and reluctantly down the hill to his bed in the little crowded cottage below, with the fragrant peat-smoke curling blue beneath the rafters and his brothers rustling drowsily in the hay beside him.

One evening he made his way to his favorite seat. A soft, misty rain was falling, but little cared Michael for that—indeed he loved the cool feel of it upon his hands and face, for the day had been a hot one and he was tired.

But as he threw himself down upon the great, grey stone which crowned the hill, he thought he saw something moving upon the other side of it. It was a very slight movement and for a moment he thought that it had been made by some belated brown rabbit hurrying home to