

TÓRAÍOCHT

'A Salmon's Tale'

Written by

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Based on the Irish folktale 'An Bradán Feasa'



TÓRAÍOCHT
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EXT. IRELAND. AFTERNOON

A very wet spring day. Rain falls on thick forests and dirty grey roads and small country towns. Large dark clouds sweep across the sky.

EXT. VICTORIA APARTMENTS.

Sat just back from a narrow country road is a higgledy-piggledy renovation of a large Victorian house, more a pocket mansion really. It is drab and a touch sad looking in the rain. A collection of unique letterboxes decorate the front gate, stacked on top of and around one another. One has stick figures painted onto the side of it: a little girl in overalls and her mother.

A cyclist whizzes past, raincoat flapping in the wet wind and groceries sodden, soon followed by a bus rumbling in the opposite direction. Smoke rises from one of the house's many chimneys.

INT. VICTORIA APARTMENTS. APARTMENT 3.

From within, rain lashes against a dimly lit window. Set upon the windowsill are sentimental keepsakes and toys. Seashells. A rock with a hole in the middle. Little figurines of a red-haired knight and a druidess. There is a picture of an elderly brown-skinned woman with thick black hair, a small but ornate and bejewelled cross of St. James strung over the frame.

NANNY (O.C.)
(singing softly)
*Gabhaím molta Bríghde, iníon í le
hÉireann,
Iníon le gach tír í, molaimís go
léir í.*

Atop a fireplace mantel, a number of family photos show a young girl and her mother, as well as a long-haired dog going through the many stages of puppyhood. Firelight dances against the glass. One picture has three figures in it, but the third is lost in the shadows.

NANNY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
(singing softly)
*Lóchrann geal na Laighneach, soils'
ar feadh na tíre,
Ceann ar óigheacht Éireann, ceann
na mban ar míne.*

In a large, patterned armchair, sits a stocky, elderly woman, NANNY (an 'off duty' nun, she has a little golden cross at her breast). Beside her is a tall lamp and a small table with a vase of flowers and a large book of fairytales in Gaelic. She is nursing a steaming cup of tea on a saucer as she hums and sings softly to herself.

NANNY (CONT'D)
(singing softly)
*Tig an Geimhreadh dian dubh, gearra
lena géire,
Ach ar lá le Bríghde, gar dúinn
Earrach Éireann.*

A young girl, AOIFE (6, knitted sweater and thick socks), is sat at Nanny's feet on the large rug before the fire. A pair of wet gumboots are dripping in front of the fireplace. Behind Aoife, a long-haired, long-bodied dog, SACHA, is melting across the floor in deep sleep.

Aoife is having just as much trouble staying awake. Her head keeps nodding forwards. Beside her is her own steaming cup of tea, still full.

NANNY (CONT'D)
(singing softly)
*Iníon le gach tír í, molaimís go
léir í,
Gabhaim molta Bríghde, iníon í le
hÉireann.*

Coming to a slow and gentle finish, Nanny sets about stirring her tea. It is almost rhythmic.

NANNY (CONT'D)
Ah, that should about do it.

Nanny brings the cups to her lips and sips. As she sets it down, there is a lipstick mark along the edge. The lemon slice within her teacup spins lazily in the hot water. Around and around and around...

Nanny looks up from her tea, somewhat of a mischievous glint in her eye, just as Aoife looks ready to fall asleep.

NANNY (CONT'D)
Have I ever told you the tale of An
Bradán Feasa?

Aoife becomes immediately alert, sitting up respectfully and shaking her head. Nanny sets aside her tea, clears her throat and clasps her hands.

NANNY (CONT'D)
 An Bradán Feasa is an ancient
 creature, a great speckled salmon
 that resides at the heart of world.

As Nanny begins her tale, Aoife slumps back into a sleepy daze once more.

NANNY (CONT'D)
 But it was not alone for there was
 also a hazel tree. And it was
 within the branches of this tree
 that all the knowledge of the known
 world was gathered.

Aoife's head starts to nod again, and she tries to hold it up by her cheeks, but her whole body continues to droop forward until she is lying across the floor. Balancing her head in her hands, she watches Nanny as her eyes blink slowly. Blink, blink...blink...blink...

CLOSE UP

NANNY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
 Then came the day when a single
 hazelnut fell into the salmon's
 well.

The lemon slice in Nanny's cup begins to change shape, fins and a tail appearing as it morphs into a salmon.

INT. CLEARING. FOREST.

A blue lit clearing made from hazelnut trees curves around the light coming from a deep pool of water in the centre.

NANNY (V.O.)
 Now whether or not the salmon ate
 the hazelnut or merely absorbed its
 knowledge from the well, the tales
 are fond of arguing the point, but
 what was for sure was that the
 first person to not only catch, but
 catch and eat the fish, would in
 turn acquire its great wisdom.

A large salmon swims lazily in circles in the middle of the deep blue pool. Large hazelnuts hang from the surrounding tree branches and decorate the forest floor.

A bearded man, FINNEGAS, is perched on a rock overlooking the pool, a fishing rod sitting loosely in his gnarled hands.

They are callused and there is an ancient harp propped up beside his rock.

NANNY (V.O.)

Many tried and failed but it was the great poet Finnegas who was most relentless in his pursuit of the salmon. That was until the arrival of a young boy who wished to be a young poet...

A figure emerges into the clearing, pushing roughly through the bushes and trees. This is the YOUNG POET, a polished and new looking harp strung upon his back. Finnegas purposefully ignores the young poet, continuing to watch the salmon swim around and around his fishing line. The young poet cautiously steps towards Finnegas, waving his hand in front of him. Slowly, Finnegas looks up at him, his overgrown eyebrows scrunched into a thick frown.

NANNY (V.O.)

At first he accused the young boy of being a changeling sent to distract him.

Finnegas makes a remark that causes the young poet to look indignant, but Finnegas just chuckles to himself, shaking his head.

NANNY (V.O.)

You see, Finnegas had spent many hundreds of years guarding that pool, and in turn had weathered many hundreds of foolish thieves and even more foolish heroes.

Unphased, Finnegas gestures towards the pool. The young poet steps forward, looking down upon the salmon swimming its circles. He doesn't look impressed.

NANNY (V.O.)

But our young poet was, well, young. He had not grown up on tales of heroes and magical fish for they were already myth in his time. Nor did he know it was the destiny of a Fionn to one day catch this great fish and absorb all the knowledge it had to share.

AOIFE (V.O.)

So why hasn't he?

INT. VICTORIA APARTMENTS. APARTMENT 3.

Aoife is a little more awake now, although Sacha is still asleep and has assumed a pose that looks far from comfortable. Nanny looks up sharply at being interrupted.

NANNY

Why hasn't he what?

AOIFE

Eaten it already?

Nanny's face softens.

CLOSE UP

NANNY (V.O.)

Ah hah, now that is the beauty of the thing...

Rain droplets run down the window pane, chasing one another. Sometimes, they almost look like fish, like salmon fording a river. They drip and drop onto a little puddle by the window ledge, sending ripples across the water's surface.

INT. CLEARING. FOREST.

Ripples spread out across the surface of the salmon's pond.

NANNY (V.O.)

...he does not need to eat it yet because one day he knows that he will. There is no rush when what is to come was foretold, little one.

The young poet, now sat beside Finnegas and the pool with his head in his hands, looks annoyed. They both watch the fish, one a lot more impatient than the other.

NANNY (V.O.)

In this, you and our young poet are much the same. He too was unable to fathom waiting upon an ancient fortune.

The young poet uses a nearby stick to draw bored squiggles in the dirt before him. Finnegas appears to be humming a tune, conducting himself with one bony hand.

NANNY (V.O.)

He was impatient and pestered
Finnegas for many days and many
nights. But nothing would budge the
old man.

The young poet is lying on his back, hands tucked behind his head and staring up towards the heavens. Finnegas looks like he is asleep, his head hanging forward over his chest. His fishing rod is straight and suspended over the pool.

NANNY (V.O.)

On the final day, in parting he
asked one last question. How did
Finnegas know that this fish was
the right one?

Finnegas snaps awake, looking over at the young poet. He looks angry and starts waving his arms about at the accusation.

NANNY (V.O.)

But this only angered him, setting
them off bickering once more.

AOIFE (V.O.)

He could have licked it.

INT. VICTORIA APARTMENTS. APARTMENT 3.

Aoife is now a starfish upon the carpet, arms and legs spread as she lies flat on her back. Sacha has assumed a new, equally strange position. Nanny is intrigued by Aoife's suggestion.

NANNY

Licked it?

AOIFE

Yeah. That wouldn't hurt it and
then if he's wrong then the salmon
is still okay.

Nanny thinks this through, retrieving her cup of tea. Aoife, still on her back, stares upside down into the fireplace.

CLOSE UP

The fire is flickering and taking on intriguing shapes within the fireplace. As the world rotates the right way up, one of the sparks crackles and pops into the air, assuming the shape of a large hazelnut. Another fish-shaped spark quickly jumps up after it, swallowing it whole.

NANNY (V.O.)
Hmmm...intrigued by the young poet's suggestion, Finnegas decided to make the first move for the first time in a hundred years.

INT. CLEARING. FOREST.

Finnegas, crouched beside the pool, sticks out his arm and catches the fish mid-jump in his knobbly fists. To the side, the young poet has been doused in a shock of cold water.

The fish flounders in the air as Finnegas pauses for just a beat before squeezing his eyes shut and leaning forwards to lick the fish on its flapping tail...

NANNY (V.O.)
Well?

INT. VICTORIA APARTMENTS. APARTMENT 3.

Nanny is looking at Aoife expectantly.

AOIFE
What?

Aoife is distracted. She has procured paper and crayons and spread them all around her on the floor. Sacha is also spread out amongst the mess, snoring.

NANNY
What would you ask him? To see if it worked.

Aoife pauses her arts and crafts for a moment, rubbing at her chin.

AOIFE
What's one billion times eighty-four plus ninety-nine and a hundred?

Nanny laughs softly.

NANNY
This is an ancient being, more full of knowledge and wisdom than either you or I. Than anyone living or dead. Maybe it would be wise of the young poet to ask Finnegas something a bit...wider.

AOIFE

Maybe.

Aoife has returned to her drawings, tongue between her teeth while focusing. Nanny sips from her tea, watching Aoife over the rim of her cup.

NANNY

Maybe he should--

AOIFE

Did you know lizards have teeth.

Nanny raises an eyebrow, somewhat amused.

NANNY

I don't think that's true.

AOIFE

It is, I read about it.

Aoife looks up briefly at Nanny's disbelieving expression before quickly turning away.

AOIFE (CONT'D)

Well, maybe it's not true. I lied.
A boy at school told me. He really
likes lizards.

CLOSE UP

Aoife's drawing, which is often covered by her hands, or her elbows sticking out as she furiously colours in. We're not entirely sure what she's concocting.

NANNY (O.C.)

I don't think I've ever met a
lizard with teeth before.

AOIFE

They're just tiny dinosaurs, did
you know that?

Nanny laughs.

NANNY (O.C.)

No, I didn't.

MOTHER (O.C.)

(softly)

What does that make dinosaurs?

AOIFE

Big lizards, obviously.

A shadow falls over part of Aoife's drawing.

MOTHER (O.C.)

Well it seems like you've been
learning all sorts while I was
gone.

AOIFE

Mamma!

We finally see Aoife's drawing as she drops her crayon and jumps up from the floor. As Aoife and the shadow move away we see that Aoife has drawn a large coloured picture of a fish with teeth. In the corner she has written: *Braadarn Farsa*.

CREDITS BEGIN

INT. BATHROOM. APARTMENT 3. NIGHT.

Aoife is having her bath, Sacha sat beside her and the bathtub. She plays with her toy knights and a large serpent-looking figurine. Suddenly a small salmon jumps out of the water, splashing Sacha with water, before diving back in again. Aoife doesn't notice, but Sacha most certainly does.

CREDITS END