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OF SANTIAGO DE GUAYAQUIL**

**FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES  
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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“Annotated Translation of the Work of Irish Mythology *“The Boyhood of Fionn.”*”

**AUTHOR:**

Rodrigo Alberto Ycaza Vallarino

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**PROJECT ADVISOR**

José Antonio De Abreu Ferreira

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents. Thanks for everything.





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**Project Advisor**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The following project consists of the translation into the Spanish language of the medieval Irish folktale *The Boyhood of Fionn*, as retold by author James Stephens, and a subsequent annotated translation process in which an analysis is provided in order to explain the decisions that were taken when it comes to the rendering of this particular text. This has been accomplished by using translation techniques proposed by English professor of translation Peter Newmark. The decision to work and develop this project was made for two reasons: the first one is to improve personal skills as a translator of fiction by providing the rendering to a work featuring a medieval form of English, which was challenging, as the language used in it features many unfamiliar complexities and the second one is to provide a translation into Spanish of a work that has not been officially translated into this language as of yet. The aforementioned analysis has been done by means of developing extralinguistic charts that feature extracts taken from both versions of the text and comparing them; in the case of the translated version, an explanation of what technique was used to render them into Spanish has been included as a means to provide recommendations for potential translators when having to render texts of this nature.

**Keywords:** annotated translation, translation techniques, Irish mythology, medieval literature, folktales/fairy tales.

## INTRODUCTION

### Topic and Justification

*“Fairy tales, folk tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labor created our world.”* (Carter, 2005)

Since the dawn of countries and societies all over the world, folktales have played an important role in their cultural development. Folktales capture the very essence of a culture, as these are usually set in the region where they originated from, and are embedded with their local elements and customs in their storytelling.

The aspect that sets folktales apart from other forms of literature and makes them special is that these have been told orally from generation to generation. *“For most of human history, ‘literature,’ both fiction and poetry, has been narrated, not written — heard, not read.* (Carter, 2005) Just imagine how compelling and impactful these stories must be for the people of a particular country or region to remember them by memory (as these predate written literature in most cases), and feeling the responsibility to pass them on to their children/young, not only as a way of providing entertainment to them, but also to serve other purposes such as teaching them important lessons about life or morality or to explain things which, at the time, were not understood. It could be said that every time someone tells a folktale, they are preserving their local culture and contributing to its existence.

Irish author James Stephens (1880-1950) clearly recognized the importance that these stories have and how valuable it is to preserve them, which is why his book *Irish Fairy Tales*, released in 1920, consists of a retelling of 10 folktales from Irish mythology. Stephens did a great contribution to the culture and literature of his country, as he put into writing some of the most well-known Irish folktales, which will serve as a written document of these classic stories and make them more available for everyone to read in the future.

Having said that, many believe that these folktales could not only have great value to their local culture, but people from all over the world should also have the opportunity to enjoy these works of fiction in order to enrich their life with tales and stories about other places, as humans should always aspire to gain as much knowledge as they possibly can; but this should not only include knowledge about one's personal surroundings, but also knowledge about faraway places with completely different beliefs and customs from your own. If we're referring to a Spanish speaking context, the translation of a work of this nature could be considered challenging, and the work in question comes from a time and place that is perhaps not widely regarded as well-known in the Spanish-speaking region: medieval Ireland.

Out of the 10 tales featured in the book, arguably the most well-known one has been chosen: *The Boyhood of Fionn*. The reason why this fairy tale in particular is so memorable in Ireland and has such a strong meaning to this people is undoubtedly because of the titular character: Fionn mac Cumhaill, the most famous hero in Irish mythology. Fionn is presented as a morally strong young man that makes use of both his physical prowess and mental strength to overcome incredible odds and defeat powerful and evil enemies. Adults probably feel compelled to tell this tale to their children as Fionn represents a good role model they could look up to.

To conclude, a rendering into a general Spanish that could be understood by all speakers of this language has been provided. It is worth mentioning that as there is no official translation into Spanish of this work as of yet, this could be an important contribution for the Spanish-speaking readership, as it will make this fairy tale from another culture available for them to experience and enjoy.

### **Research Questions**

Having completed the translation process, a detailed analysis of some of the choices taken for rendering specific terms and linguistic elements will be provided; but before that, some important research questions should be outlined to be later developed and answered in an effective manner:

1. What are the linguistic features of this work of literature? How does its context influence the language used?

2. What are the most common and effective translation techniques/approaches used when rendering texts which feature an archaic register?

3. Is human translation still necessary for rendering works of literature or have machine translation tools made their work obsolete?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The rendering of texts which feature an archaic register could potentially present a challenge for a translator, as it is a form of language which is not commonly used in present time. This project finds out what are the most common and effective translating approaches and techniques to render these types of texts into another language. A conclusion about the necessity of human translators despite the invention of machine translation tools is sought as well.

### **General Objective**

This project aims to provide an annotated translation of a folktale of Irish mythology with the purpose of developing a guideline for potential translators when it comes to rendering texts which feature archaic or outdated language.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. Extract linguistic units from the ST that could be used as reference for particular localized or archaic terminology featured in this work. Compare them with their TT counterparts.

2. Use techniques suggested by Peter Newmark to provide comprehensive explanations about the decisions taken in the translation process.

3. Provide conclusions and recommendations which could be useful for potential translators when it comes to rendering texts of this particular nature into another language.

## **BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE**

### **Literary Fiction**

*“The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.”* (Wilde, 1895)

It is said that one of the main purposes of fiction is to provide the audience with an escape from reality, which is why in fiction, the author is not constrained by facts or real events and is able to come up with a story directly from his imagination. This is where genres like folktales or more specifically, fairy tales are born. Fairy tales are always set in a different reality than ours, as these tend to feature imaginary beings such as: elves, dragons, witches, talking animals, goblins, etc. A good fiction writer must be able to depict these characters in such a way that it appeals to the imagination of the readers and they are able to picture these beings in their own minds.

Wilde’s quote is relevant when it comes to fiction, as this type of stories tend to be tales of morality where good always prevails over evil (this is particularly true in the case of fairy tales); this is something that attracts the interest of audiences all over the world as most humans will naturally tend to aspire for things to go in a positive way. Unfortunately, in reality, this will not always be the case, as everyday life tends to be filled with hardships and struggles and sometimes many negative things will occur.

Fiction serves as a balm for the mind of a troubled reader, as it allows him/her to escape that reality and be immersed in another world. That is why fiction serves such a necessary purpose for humans.

### **Translation**

*“It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language that is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.”* (Benjamin, 1969)



The importance of translation for humanity seems to be an obvious one: many important works written in a particular language are of such relevance that there is the need for these to be made available into as many languages as possible; the more people who are able to access and experience the work, the better.

A translation process from one language into another can be found everywhere from a translated version of a book, a subtitled film, the work of an interpreter in a live conference, etc. Thanks to this process, societies all over the world are able to break down the “language barrier” and have the opportunity to connect with people or works that belong to a different culture than their own.

As Benjamin rightfully claims, the translator has a responsibility to take the language used in a work and effectively render in another language in a way that makes sense and is perfectly comprehensible for the target audience of that particular translated version.

### **Annotated Translation**

Annotated translation is a special type of translation where the translator includes analysis/commentary on his own work with the purpose of justifying the choices he/she made during the process. Annotated translation works are particularly useful for inexperienced translators in seek of a guideline of how to make effective decisions when it comes to rendering a work into another language.

### **Irish Literature**

*“The Irish way of telling a story is a complex and elaborate one, complete with wild exaggerations, a certain delight in improbable fantasy, and a heightened sense of drama.”*  
(Tierney, 2015)

Irish literature has a rich history and has been widely renowned all over the world. The earliest recordings of literature in Ireland date as far back as the seventh century, when Irish clergymen wrote mythology and poetry. Short stories would later become a genre which Irish writers particularly mastered.

Some of the most well-known writers this country has to offer include: Jonathan Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*), Oscar Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*), Bram Stoker (*Dracula*), C.S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), George Bernard Shaw (*Pygmalion*), James Joyce (*Ulysses*), among others.

Despite the fact that there are many writers who have chosen to write in Irish and are popular in their country, the most critically acclaimed and awarded Irish authors are the ones who have written in English, which makes sense considering this is the most spoken language, not only in Ireland, but in the world.

### **About the author**

*"What the heart knows today the head will understand tomorrow."* (Stephens, *The Crock of Gold*, 1912)

James Stephens was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February of 1880 in Dublin, Ireland. As a writer, Stephens became well-known for his retelling of Irish folktales in his own particular style. The collections *Deirdre* and most famously, *Irish Fairy Tales* were met with praise, as Stephens showcased and ability to bring these centuries old tales to a new audience in a way that was both entertaining and comprehensible while maintaining the essence of this classic tales.

Aside from this, Stephens produced other notable works such as the original novel *The Crock of Gold*, books of poems and a historical account of the Easter Rising in 1916, titled *Insurrection in Dublin*, where he vividly describes the horrors caused by the real-life armed conflict between the Irish revolutionaries and the British troops in a failed attempt to end British rule in Ireland. Stephens died on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December of 1950, leaving behind an important legacy as a writer in his home country.

### **About the work: The Boyhood of Fionn**

*The Boyhood of Fionn* (also known as *The Boyhood Deeds of Fionn*) is a medieval fairy tale of Irish mythology which belongs to the "Fenian Cycle". The aforementioned cycle refers to a period where mythology focused on the adventures of one of the most famous

Irish mythical heroes: Fionn mac Cumhaill. This character is described as a child who embarks on a “hero’s journey” and comes out of it as a morally strong young man with great physical and mental strength. In *The Boyhood of Fionn*, he is able to use his superior skills to defeat a god-like evil creature that has been terrorizing an entire city for years and, in doing so, claims his rightful place as protector of Ireland.

The language present in this fairy tale is full of lyricism and features vivid descriptions of natural landscapes and different animals, as it is set in wooded, medieval Ireland. The setting is also noticeable as many different regions and cities of this country are mentioned. The language used could also be seen as outdated or even archaic by modern audiences as Stephens employed a writing style that is faithful to the one of the original folktales written many centuries ago.

This work, as all others in Irish folklore, serves as a tale of morality in which a hero has to first overcome various hardships and struggles to eventually be able to defeat an evil enemy. This is why these orally transmitted stories have proven to be historically popular with parents who tell these to their children, as it contains valuable lessons about honor and principles and presents a good role model they can look up to in Fionn (who starts the narrative as a child himself).

### **Linguistic features**

As this is a retelling of a medieval folktale, it features an archaic register that can be clearly seen in the choice of words used by the author. This makes sense, considering the narrative is set in a medieval Irish context itself. As it is common in folktales, the narrator is an omniscient one, as he/she knows every aspect about the characters and the narrative, even the future of these. The work does feature some instances of borrowing, in this case from Irish, which is logical considering this is the language in which this tale was first told orally. The use of Irish words also makes the text feel connected to its traditional roots, which enriches the narrative. One of the most prevalent literary elements employed is imagery, as the work is filled with vivid descriptions about natural landscapes such as woods, mountains, rivers, hills, etc. An example of this device in use in *The Boyhood of Fionn* would be: “*There would have been hours as long, when*

*existence passed like a shade among shadows, in the multitudinous tappings of rain that dripped from leaf to leaf in the wood, and slipped so to the ground.*" (Stephens, Irish Fairy Tales, 1920) This device is commonly used in works of fiction, as it appeals to the imagination of the readers and immerses them into the setting of the narrative.

### **Translation Terminology**

Translation, like every other specialized field, has its own particular terminology. Here are some of the most notable ones, which will be featured throughout this project:

**\*Source text (ST):** refers to the original work which is being translated, in this case *The Boyhood of Fionn*.

**\*Target text (TT):** refers to the translated version of the original work.

**\*Source language (SL):** refers to the language in which the source text was written. In the case of *The Boyhood of Fionn*, it is English.

**\*Target language (TL):** refers to the language in which the source text is being translated to, in this case Spanish.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In *A Textbook of Translation*, English professor and author Peter Newmark goes on to outline some of the most well-known methods of translation, which can be divided into two sections: translation approaches and translation techniques. The following are some of the most commonly used examples of each:

### 1. Translation Approaches:

#### **\*Literal Translation:**

Technique in which the translator simply looks for an equivalent term in the TL language, without considering context. In contrast with a basic word-for-word method, this technique could possibly be employed when translating full texts, but it is not an effective technique if the purpose is to be communicative. An example of this technique in use could be rendering the English phrase: “a chip off the old block” into Spanish as “una astilla del viejo bloque”. The translation is technically correct, but it fails on a communicative level as this means nothing in Spanish. An effective rendering would be: “de tal palo tal astilla”, as that has the same meaning as the phrase used in the SL.

#### **\*Faithful Translation:**

Technique in which the translator takes a TL-biased approach and decides to keep as many elements from the ST intact in his rendering. Examples of this could include keeping names of characters, places and even some terms featured in ST the same in the TT version of the work. In my rendering of *The Boyhood of Fionn*, this technique can be seen as names of characters such as the titular Fionn remain unchanged (as opposed to changing his name into a Spanish one like “Fernando”) and names of places such as “Kerry” and “Boyne”, as altering that would be a betrayal of the local culture in which this work is set. The faithful approach to translation could include techniques such as borrowings (taking words directly from one language into another without translation).

### **\*Communicative Translation:**

*“Communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.” (Newmark, 1988)*

Its goal is to make the text as comprehensible as possible for the TT audience, in many cases disregarding elements of the SL culture. Previously used examples such as replacing “George Best” with “Pelé” in a rendered version or the translation of the phrase “a chip off the old block” as “de tal palo tal astilla” are perfect examples of this technique in use. This is also known as modulation, a technique in which instead of translating phrases or idioms word-for-word, the translator looks for appropriate equivalents in the TL. This tends to be the most common approach when translating literature from one text to another, as the main purpose is to entertain an audience, which would be impossible if they are not able to understand every literary element present in the narrative. One particular use of communicative translation that will be prevalent throughout the extralinguistic analysis is the process of latinisation, which refers to the imposition of Latin-based terms or grammatical structures onto another language, in this case from some names or terms in Irish in the ST to Spanish in the TT.

## **2. Translation Techniques:**

### **\*Compensation:**

It's the type of translation in which an inevitable loss in meaning from ST to TT will occur due to several linguistic or cultural reasons. The translator has to find a way in which to provide a rendering that will make sense in his TT version despite the fact that it will lose some of the essence of the original work. Newmark stated that *“This (compensation) is said to occur when loss of meaning, sound-effect, metaphor or pragmatic effect in one part of a sentence is compensated in another part, or in a contiguous sentence.”* (Newmark, 1988) The types of compensation used for this project are:

**1. Compensation in kind:** type of compensation in which a part of speech or type of phrase in the TS is modified into another in the TT. For instance, a noun phrase is

rendered into a verb phrase or an adjective phrase is modified into an adverb phrase. Eg: “John ran happily across the field.” (adverbial phrase) into “El alegre John corría por el campo.” (verb phrase).

**2. Compensation by merging:** consists in condensing large linguistic units present in the ST and featuring them in a shorter way in the TT. Eg: “The blue-eyed warrior killed the red dragon.” into “El guerrero mato al dragón rojo”.

**3. Compensation by splitting:** the opposite of compensation by merging, in which the translator translates a linguistic unit from the ST using more words in his TT. A basic example of this would be the translation of a term such as “maple syrup” as “miel de maple” (2 words in English vs 3 in Spanish).

Aside from compensation, two more techniques are used:

**\*Omission:**

Consists in omitting certain elements included in the ST in the TT to make it sound more natural or perhaps the translator feels said element is simply not necessary.

Eg: “Carlos, hijo del benévolo monarca, llegó a casa.” into “Carlos, the son of the king, arrived home.”

**\*Reordering:**

Consists in the shift of a textual element or effect present in the ST to another part of TT. This technique tends to be used to either respect the grammatical rules of the TL or to simply make the phrase featured in the ST sound more natural in the TT. Eg: “Pedro’s red house” into “la casa roja de Pedro”.

## **Problems in the Translation Process and Analysis**

*“A language is not just words. It’s a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It’s all embodied in a language.”*  
(Chomsky, 2010)

Despite what many people living today would think, the translation process is not an easy one. It is a widespread misconception that translators are not needed anymore, as technology has now provides computer-assisted translation tools such as Google Translate, Proz, Linguee, etc. In reality, these programs are not nearly as advanced as people seem to think they are, as they are still not capable of translating in context; they may be useful to translate a word or a sentence at best, but entire paragraphs (especially ones taken from works of literature) will be rendered in a mostly ineffective way.

One of the keywords to consider here is context. As it is common knowledge, many terms on the English language have more than one meaning, which could result in ambiguity. For example, the term “adder” could mean both a species of snake and a computer device used for adding numbers. A term such as this one, if used several times throughout a text, could cause errors and in translations many computer-assisted translation programs; this is not a problem for a human translator, as they have the capacity to read the text in its entirety first and then take conscious decisions in regards to the translation. So, in the sentence: “my cousin was bitten by an adder”, the human translator, using his real-world knowledge, is able to accurately translate the sentence as: “mi primo fue mordido por una víbora”, as he/she is aware that that is the rendering which makes sense in that particular context. One of the most important things that a translator must consider when rendering a text into another language is that his/her TT version must not feature any instance of ambiguity that could cause confusions upon reading.

Another important aspect to consider in the decision-making process of the translation is what approach will be used to render the TT version of the text. Two possible paths that a translator may choose are SL-biased or TL-biased. The former refers to the approach of being faithful to a fault of the ST, which includes keeping as many elements from the



SL culture as possible intact; the latter refers to the approach of being as communicative as possible, that is to say that the translator will alter as many elements from the ST as needed to make the TT version more understandable/enjoyable for the TL audience. An example of how to use these two approaches could be the rendering of the sentence: "He was a skilled player, he reminded me of George Best."

**\*SL-biased approach:** "Era un jugador habilidoso, me recordaba a George Best."

But if the TL is Spanish, specifically targeted for a Latin American audience, a translator may choose to translate the sentence as:

**\*TL-biased approach:** "Era un jugador habilidoso, me recordaba a Pelé."

The TL audience, in this case Latin American, is much more likely to understand the reference used in the TL-biased approach than the one in the SL-biased approach, as it references someone who is more well-known in that region. Having said that, the reference always has to make sense in context, as it would not be logical if a translator would have replaced the football player in the ST for someone with a different profession in the TT version. The rendering: "Era un jugador habilidoso, me recordaba a Gustavo Cerati.", would be an ineffective one, as despite the fact that the person mentioned in the translated version is well-known in the region, he is not a football player, which makes the translation nonsensical in the context of the ST narrative. Another aspect to consider is the context of time, as it would also not be effective to render the sentence as: "Era un jugador habilidoso, me recordaba a Messi.", as despite the fact that the person referenced is a football player, he played much later than the one mentioned in the ST version (perhaps even later than when the work is set or even written), so it would also not make sense in the context of the narrative.

The most effective and recommended translation approach is one where the TT is as communicative as possible, yet is able to retain some important cultural aspects of the original work. In Gregory Rabassa's translation of works written by Latin American

authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, small but important aspects such as the names of places and characters are kept the same, as even if he's rendering the work for an English-speaking audience, he simply cannot change the names of characters to English ones or change the names of towns or places to names of American towns, as that would be a betrayal of the nature of the narrative. However, elements such as colloquialisms, vulgarisms, proverbs, etc. are altered to ones that could be perfectly understood by an English-speaking audience, as they need to be able to fully grasp what these means to have a better enjoyment of the narrative. An example of this would be the rendering of the extract: *"El mundo habrá acabado de joderse – dijo entonces- el día en que los hombres viajen en primera clase y la literatura en el vagón de carga."* (García Márquez, 1967), from Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, originally published in Spanish, to Rabassa's rendering of it in his English-translated version: *"The world must be all fucked up,"* he said then, *"when men travel first class and literature goes as freight."* (García Marquéz, 1971) There, we can see how the translator must have the capacity of adapting all forms of registers from the SL to the TL in such a seamless manner that the TT audience could feel like the text was written originally in their language.

These are some of the complexities featured in the translation process and it shows that the decision making process of a translator must be a careful one, considering various context-related aspects present in the ST to avoid ambiguities in the TT that will produce an ineffective translation. The translation approaches suggested by Newmark are an effective and comprehensive way for a potential translator to start developing a better understanding of how to render particular instances from one language into another, as he explains these in a way in which someone with even a basic understanding of the field of translation could easily be able to grasp due to the simplistic and practical of the language he uses.

## METHODOLOGY

This linguistic analysis has been divided into two parts which will both use tables as the data-collecting instruments needed for this work: the first part consists of providing instances of the aforementioned translation approaches/techniques with actual examples taken from the rendering into Spanish of *“The Boyhood of Fionn”*. This part attempts to present an even clearer picture of how to use these methods during the translation process, as they are not hypothetical examples, but ones featured in an actual translation process which have been compared with their ST counterparts. This also serves as a way to visualize key linguistic differences in the respective registers featured in both versions. Three clear examples of each approach/technique have been featured in this part of the analysis.

The second part focuses on the elaboration of four extralinguistic charts which have been divided into four important linguistic categories featured in both the ST and TT versions of the work. These fields are:

- +Names of characters and places.
- +Instances of localized language.
- +Names of animals and natural elements.
- +Others.

This division of fields will make the process be more organized and comprehensible for the reader, in an attempt at potentially helping other translators to better understand the complexities of the translation process. All the findings that have been featured during this analysis are relevant ones, as they represent culturally or linguistically important elements used by the author of the original work. Each finding presented also includes the approach/technique used for its rendering and an explanation of it only if necessary.

## COLLECTION OF DATA

### 1. Translation Approaches:

#### \*Literal Translation:

ST version	TT version	Justification
"King of Kerry."	"Rey de Kerry."	The equivalent term in the TL has been used to render this term.
"Ireland."	"Irlanda."	The equivalent term in the TL has been used to render this term.
"The Red Hand."	"La Mano Roja."	Name of an organization/symbol is translated literally, word for word. It is the equivalent term used in the TL.

#### \*Faithful translation:

ST version	TT version	Justification
"Fianna."	"Fianna."	Faithful translation. Term in Irish is left as it is a borrowing in the TT, with a proper explanation at the footer. The decision to borrow this term was because it is an instance where preserving an element from the original

		language seemed to have cultural relevance.
“Shi.”	“Shi.”	Faithful translation. Term in Irish which translates into “tribe”. When used as part of a name of a place such as “Shi’ Finnachy” or referring to these, the Irish term is rendered as a borrowing.
“Timpan.”	“Timpan.”	Faithful translation. Term in Irish is left as it is a borrowing in the TT, with a proper explanation at the footer. Refers to a traditional Irish string instrument for which there is no actual equivalent in the TL, so keeping it as a borrowing in the TT was the best choice for this particular rendering.

**\*Communicative Translation:**

<b>ST version</b>	<b>TT version</b>	<b>Justification</b>
“Ard-Ri”	“Rey Supremo”	Term used in the ST version comes directly from Irish. While there are instances in which terms in that language have been

		left the same, in a cases like this it's usually more effective to find the nearest equivalent in the TL, as this is a very foreign language for the target audience and misunderstandings need to be avoided by the translator.
"The Galtees"	"Las montañas Galtees"	Refers to a mountain range located in Munster, Ireland. This is an instance where the ST writer simply assumes his audience knows about this place and what is in it. This may be correct in the case of the local audience, but for the TT audience, using a literal approach ("los Galtees") would certainly be confusing, as in many cases, the readers are not going to be familiar with this place.
"That band should have chattered like a rookery."	"En esa banda debieron haber parlotado como pericos."	The connotation in both extracts is quite similar yet not exactly the same, as both refer to bird species, but different kinds. The ST version mentions "a

		<p>rookery” which would literally translate to “colonia de grajos.” A rook or “grajo” in Spanish is a black bird that’s native to the Eurasian region and is therefore more commonly known in that area. That is not the case in the TL culture, where this bird would not be quite known. This communicative approach chooses the bird species “perico”, which also a type of bird, but one that’s famously known for constantly talking and making noises and an expression such as “hablaban como pericos” is one that is easily understandable and used in the TL audience.</p>
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**2. Translation Techniques:**

**\*Compensation in kind:**

<b>ST version</b>	<b>TT version</b>	<b>Justification</b>
“... for the Peace of Ireland was in being.”	“...ya que Irlanda se encontraba en tiempos de paz.”	The noun phrase “Peace of Ireland” featured in the ST is rendered as the verb

		<p>phrase “Irlanda se encontraba en tiempos de paz.” to make it this phrase comprehensible for the TL audience. “Peace of Ireland”, as its name suggest, refers to a time during this era in which Ireland was not involved in armed conflict, which is something that will probably be known for a native reader, but not for one who belongs to the TL audience.</p>
<p>“He is fair and well-shaped.”</p>	<p>“Tiene el cabello rubio y buen físico.”</p>	<p>Both extracts physically describe Fionn. The first uses the noun phrase “he is fair”, which is rendered into an adjective phrase as “tiene el cabello rubio” in the TL. Both refer to the color of his hair.</p>
<p>“It is a long time,” said wondering Fionn.</p>	<p>“Bastante tiempo,” replicó admirado.</p>	<p>The adverb phrase “said wondering” has been rendered in the TT version with the adjective phrase “replicó admirado”, as that way it sounds more natural in the TL.</p>



**\*Compensation by merging:**

ST version	TT version	Justification
<p>“These were the women druids, Bovmall and Lia Luachra.”</p>	<p>“Ellas eran las druidas, Bovmall y Lia Luachra.”</p>	<p>Because of the use of gender in the TL, it is not necessary to include the word “women” (“mujeres”) in the TT version. In this case, the feminine article “ellas” already tells the audience it’s referring to women. The English article “these”, on the other hand, is gender neutral, therefore an specification of the characters’ gender needs to be made.</p>
<p>“He would have known little snaky paths, narrow enough to be filled by his own small feet.”</p>	<p>“Debió haber conocido pequeños caminos serpenteantes, tan estrechos como para ser ocupados por sus piecitos.”</p>	<p>In this case, the term “small feet” is rendered in one word by using the diminutive form “piecitos”. Both extracts have the same meaning (referring to the feet of a child)</p>
<p>“... a new notion to ponder on.”</p>	<p>“... una nueva noción con la cual reflexionar.”</p>	<p>Refers to the mental state of Fionn after he was visited by his mother for the first time; it gave him a lot to think about. This is reflected in the ST by the phrase “ponder on”,</p>

		rendered into Spanish by using the verb “reflexionar”, as both share a similar connotation.
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**\*Compensation by splitting:**

<b>ST version</b>	<b>TT version</b>	<b>Justification</b>
“Fionn’s mother was beautiful, long-haired Muirne.”	“La madre de Fionn era una mujer hermosa de cabello largo llamada Muirne.”	Because of the different grammatical structures of both languages, the TT version of this extract needs to be make use of more words than the one in the ST. The compound word “long-haired” is not replicable into Spanish, which is why this had to be rendered as “de cabello largo”, as this way, the grammatical rules of the TL are also respected.
“He had birds for playmates.”	“Los pájaros eran sus compañeros de juego.”	For an appropriate rendering of the English term “playmates”, the rendering needs to be split into “compañeros de juego”, as there is not a one word equivalent in the TL. This is also, once again, a case where the structure of the sentence needs to be

		modified in order to respect the rules of Spanish grammar.
"Wild Connatchmen."	"Hombres salvajes de Connatch."	The demonym "Connatchmen" is used in the ST version to refer to a group of men who are native from the Connatch province in Ireland. The suffixation "-man/men" is a common one to use in the case of natives from towns or regions of the British Isles. To avoid confusing renderings of this not very well-known place for the TL audience, the simplified approach "hombres de Connatch" was employed, as both versions have the same meaning and the rendering is a comprehensible one for the TT audience.

**\*Reordering:**

ST version	TT version	Justification
"Fionn asked every question he could think of, and his master, who was a	"Fionn realizo todas las preguntas que se le ocurrían y su maestro, que	This phrase is slightly altered in the ST version, particularly the terms

poet, and so an honorable man, answered them all, not to the limit of his patience, for it was limitless, but to the limit of his ability.”	era poeta y un hombre honorable, las respondió todas, siendo únicamente limitado por su habilidad, no por su paciencia.”	“patience” (“paciencia”) and “ability” (“habilidad”) have been switched in place, as this order makes the phrase sound more natural in the TL.
““A prophecy was made to me,” Finegas began.”	“Recibí una profecía,” inicio Finegas.”	The sentence is reordered in the TT to respect the proper structure of the TL. Translating this phrase with a literal approach would have resulted in a confusing and nonsensical rendering.
“It was not from the Shi, however, that assistance came to Fionn.”	“Sin embargo, la ayuda para Fionn no llegaría desde Shi.”	The sentence has been reordered in the TT version to make it sound more natural in the TL. A clear alteration is the placement of the connectors (“however”/ “sin embargo”), as the one in the ST version is in the middle, while the TT one is at the beginning.

**\*Omission:**

ST version	TT version	Justification
“... her brother was Lugh of the Long Hand.”	“También era hermano del mismísimo Lugh.”	“Lugh” is the name of an important Irish deity. Many of these deities have

		nicknames or longer version of their names. The ST version makes of the longer version “Lugh of the Long Hand”. The TT uses a more simplified approach by simply using his name, as the rest seems to be an unnecessary addition that could cause confusions for the TL audience.
“... it is possible that at some time Conn had adventured into Tir na n-Og, the Land of the Young.”	“... es posible que en algún momento Conn se haya aventurado hacia la Tierra de la Juventud.”	The TT version of this extract omits the name of this place, which is an Irish one, and rather solely translate the nickname in which this is known for, in an attempt at producing an effective and comprehensible rendering for the TL audience.
“The Fianna of Ireland.”	“La Fianna”.	In one of the few instances of borrowing used in the translation process, the Irish term “fianna” (with an explanation in the bottom of the page) is kept the same in the TT version, as it refers specifically the armed forces that protected Ireland during this time. The

		ST rendering omits the mentioning Ireland because it has already been established that these forces are in charge of the protection of this country in particular, therefore this was done with the attempt of avoiding redundancy.
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## EXTRALINGUISTIC CHARTS

**\*Names of characters and places:**

ST version	TT version	Translation approach/technique used
"Fionn."	"Fionn."	Faithful translation. (no change made; name of character)
"Bovmall."	"Bovmall."	Faithful translation. (no change made; name of character)
"Lia Luachra."	"Lia Luachra."	Faithful translation. (no change made; name of character)
Manana'nn	Manannán	Communicative translation. (latinisation of Irish name; equivalent name in the TL was used)
"Lugh of the Long Hand."	"Lugh."	Omission. (already existing equivalent in TL was used)
"Uail/ Uail mac Baiscne."	"Uail mac Baiscne."	Faithful translation. (decision was made to render it into the TT version only as "Uail", as he is referred to by both names throughout the ST version. This was done to avoid confusions.
"King of Kerry."	"Rey de Kerry."	Literal translation. (same meaning word-for-word)

“Morna.”	“Morna.”	Faithful translation. (no change made; name of character)
Muirne	Muirne	Faithful translation. (no change made; name of character)
“clann-Baiscne/ clann-Morna.”	“clan Baiscne/ clan Morna.”	Communicative translation. (latinisation of Irish term into the TL by using the proper equivalent)
“Cona’n the Swearer.”	“Conan el Vil.”	Communicative translation. (latinisation of Irish first name; grammar rules of the TT are respected)
“the Rough mac Morna.”	“el Cruel mac Morna.”	Communicative translation. (terms “rough” and “cruel” are not equivalents; decision was taken to render it this way to make this particular instance sound more natural in the TL)
“Fiacuil mac Cona.”	“Fiacuil mac Cona.”	Faithful translation. (no change made; name of character)
“King of Finntraigh.”	“rey de Finntraigh.”	Literal Translation. (same meaning word-for-word)
“Oisi’n [pronounced Usheen].”	“Oisin.”	Omission and latinisation. The specification of how the name is pronounced in Irish is not relevant in the TT



		version and should not be included.
“the Fair One.”	“el rubio.”	Compensation by merging. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“the Luigne of Tara.”	“el reino de Tara.”	Communicative translation. (latinisation of Irish term into the TL by using the proper equivalent)
“Tara of the Kings.”	“la colina de Tara.”	Communicative translation. (already existing equivalent name in the TL was used for this rendering)
“Ireland.”	“Irlanda.”	Literal translation. (equivalent in the TL)
“Connaught princes.”	“príncipes de Connaught.”	Literal translation. (same meaning word-for-word)
“Corm of the Hundred Battles.”	“Conn de las Cien Batallas.”	Communicative translation. (Irish name in the ST is rendered with an already existing equivalent in the TL)
“Dagda Mor, the Lord of the Underworld.”	“Dagda Mor, el Señor del Inframundo.”	Literal translation. (same meaning word-for-word)
“Tir na n-Og, the Land of the Young.”	“la Tierra de la Juventud.”	Omission. (placed referenced is better known by its nickname in the TL; rendering in full would have

		unnecessary and confusing)
“Art Og mac Morna of the Hard Strokes.”	“Art Og mac Morna.”	Omission. (already existing equivalent name in Spanish is used; shortened version of the name used in the ST)
“the tribes of Dana.”	“la tribu de los dioses.”	Communicative translation. (Dana is the tribe where gods lived in Irish mythology)
“the venomous Birgha.”	“la letal Birgha.”	Communicative translation. (the terms “venomous” and “letal” are not equivalents. Term featured in TT version was used to make this instance more understandable for the TT audience)
“the Master of the Banquet.”	“el maestro de ceremonias.”	Communicative translation. (equivalent of this term in the TL was used for this particular rendering)

**\*Instances of localized language (term highlighted):**

<b>ST version</b>	<b>TT version</b>	<b>Translation approach/technique used</b>
“Fianna.”	“Fianna.”	Faithful translation. (borrowing of Irish term directly into the TL)

“The women <u>druids</u> .”	“Las <u>druidas</u> .”	Compensation by splitting. (the TL version does not need to specify gender as it already is a gendered language)
“Clann-“	“Clan”	Communicative translation (latinisation of Irish term; equivalent name in the TL was used).
“That band should have chattered like a <u>rookery</u> .”	“En esa banda debieron haber parlotado como <u>pericos</u> .”	Communicative translation. (expression used in the ST was rendered by finding a proper equivalent in the TL; animals mentioned are not the same)
“Bards.”	“Poetas.”	Communicative translation. (both terms refer to poets, but the term used in the TT version is simplified, as the one in English implies a poet “that recites epics from an oral tradition)
“He did not leave one <u>poeteen</u> of them all.”	“... no quedo ni <u>una pizca de poeta</u> .”	Compensation by splitting. (rendering into the TL needs to be expanded due to the lack of an equivalent in the TL. The approach used is communicative, as the highlighted term in the ST is of archaic nature and

		the one in the TT is more contemporary)
“Shi.”	“Shi” and “tribu”.	Faithful and communicative translation. (rendered faithfully when it’s used before or to refer to the name of a place. Used communicatively when used in isolation). This is also an instance of borrowing.
“Samhain.”	“Samaín.”	Literal translation. (equivalent in the TL of Irish name)
“Ard-Ri.”	“Rey Supremo.”	Communicative translation. (term in Irish rendered into the TL)
“Ollav.”	“Erudito.”	Communicative translation. (term in Irish rendered into the TL)
“Discomfit.”	“Desconcertar.”	Communicative translation. (archaic register in the SL rendered in using a more contemporary one in the TL)
“Gape and fidget.”	“Boquiabierto y nervioso.”	Communicative translation. (archaic register in the SL rendered in using a more contemporary one in the TL)

“Ogham.”	“escritura ogámica.”	Compensation by splitting. (term in Irish rendered into the TL)
“Yonder/ yonder there.”	“en la distancia.”	Communicative translation. (the archaic register in the SL rendered in using a more contemporary one in the TL)
“the Red Cith/ Hand.”	“La Mano Roja.”	Literal translation. (equivalent in the TL)
“But remembered then with what a <u>pang!</u> ”	“... pero cuando se recuerda, se recuerda con <u>dolor.</u> ”	Communicative translation. (onomatopoeia in English is rendered with a regular term due to the lack of an equivalent in the TL)
“Timpan.”	“Timpan.”	Faithful translation. (borrowing of Irish term directly into the TL version)
“... or they believed in those days that like breeds like.”	“... pues en esos tiempos creían que de tal palo tal astilla.”	Communicative translation. Proverbs are usually not the same in every language, therefore an equivalent or similar one must be used in the TT.
“sleepy song.”	“canción de cuna.”	Compensation by splitting. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)

“greater-shouldered.”	“más corpulento.”	Communicative translation. (this term does not have an exact equivalent in the TL)
“... longer and cleaner limbed.”	“... más alto y mejor proporcionado.”	Communicative translation. (the term “cleaner limbed” does not have an exact equivalent in the TL)
“the notables.”	“los distinguidos.”	Communicative translation. (equivalent in the TL was used)
“At his Right hand his son Art... took his seat.”	“Hacia su derecha su hijo Art... tomó asiento.”	Communicative translation. (it would be unnatural to capitalize “right” in the TL, as this is more commonly used in the SL culture when referring to the monarch)
“a city of dream.”	“una ciudad salida de un sueño.”	Compensation by splitting. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)

**\*Names of animals and other natural elements:**

<b>ST version</b>	<b>TT version</b>	<b>Translation approach/technique used</b>
“the woods of Slieve Bloom.”	“los bosques de Slieve Bloom.”	Literal translation. (same meaning word-for-word)
“the Galtees.”	“las montañas Galtees.”	Compensation by splitting. (the TT readership needs

		clarification about what the subject mentioned is exactly).
"Moy Life'."	"rio Moy."	Communicative translation. (Irish name in the TL version rendered by using the Spanish equivalent)
"Lock Le'."	"lago Leane."	Communicative translation. (Irish name in the TL version rendered by using the Spanish equivalent)
"Boyne Water."	"rio Boyne."	Communicative translation. (archaic register featured in the TT rendered by using a more contemporary one in the ST)
"Salmon of Knowledge."	"Salmon de la Sabiduría."	Compensation by splitting. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
"throstle."	"tordo."	Literal translation. (equivalent in the TL)
"blackbird."	"mirlo."	Literal translation. (equivalent in the TL)
"... and hung to his heel as a wolf pads by the flank of a bull."	"... y se agarró de su tobillo como un lobo prendiéndose de su presa."	Communicative translation. (expression used in the ST rendered by using general language in the TT as there

		is no equivalent version in that language)
“the Glen of the Mantle.”	“la Cañada del Manto.”	Compensation by merging. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“the Ard of Fire.”	“la Colina de Fuego.”	Communicative translation. (Irish name in the TL version rendered by using the Spanish equivalent)
“... will come to-night from Slieve Fuaid.”	“... vendrá hoy desde lo más alto de las montañas.”	Compensation by splitting. (name of place that is not well-known for the TT readership is rendered this way to make it more comprehensible, therefore expanding it)
“The Nuts of Knowledge.”	“Las Nueces de la Sabiduría.”	Compensation by splitting. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“restive piebald.”	“équido intranquilo.”	Communicative translation. (the term used in the ST refers to a particular kind of horse that has black and white patches. The one in



		the TT is a more general term)
“brown stallion.”	“semental pardo.”	Reordering. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“strayed sheep.”	“oveja perdida.”	Reordering. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“gloomy woods.”	“bosques melancólicos.”	Reordering. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“tussock.”	“mata de hierbas.”	Compensation by splitting. (expanded instance due to the lack of an equivalent term)

**\*Others:**

<b>ST version</b>	<b>TT version</b>	<b>Translation approach/technique used</b>
“... Fiacuil’s great spear that had thirty rivets of Arabian gold in its socket.”	“... la gran lanza de Fiacuil la cual tenía treinta	Compensation by splitting. (the rendering used respects the grammatical

	remaches de oro árabe en su borde.”	rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“... the successive great ramparts.”	“...las grandes murallas contiguas.”	Reordering. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“osier basket.”	“canasta de mimbre.”	Compensation by splitting. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“the hut in the woods.”	“la choza en el bosque.”	Literal translation. (same meaning word-for-word)
“the bright city.”	“el resplandor de la ciudad.”	Compensation by splitting. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
“the High King’s palace.”	“el palacio del Rey Supremo.”	Reordering. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)

"sub-kingdoms."	"virreinos."	Communicative translation. (equivalent in the TL is used)
"raised dais."	"tarima elevada."	Reordering. (the rendering used respects the grammatical rules of the TT; shows structural differences between both languages)
"pavilion."	"pabellón."	Literal translation. (equivalent in the TL is used)

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

One of the main aspects that is noticeable when looking at the findings in the analysis is that, as it is to be expected, the communicative approach of translation is the most used throughout the translation process. This should come as no surprise, as, as mentioned previously, the main task of a translator is to adapt a text from a different language/culture into another in such a seamless manner, that the text would appear to have been originally written in the TL. This includes taking elements from the SL culture such as vulgarisms, colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions, etc. and replacing them for ones which result familiar for the TT audience.

It is only appropriate for the text to seem foreign to the TT reader in very particular instances, such as certain names of characters and places as, as previously stated, these are cultural elements that the translator needs to try to keep intact as much as possible so that the translated version of the work is able to retain some cultural essence from the ST. It is usually not recommended for a translator to try to adapt every single foreign element into the TL culture, especially when it comes to the translation of texts such as folktales, which are embedded with rich cultural elements from its country of origin.

Another interesting observation is the difference in both languages when it comes to the construction of sentences. Spanish tends to feature a longer form of terms and phrases than English, which is why the technique compensation by splitting is more commonly used than compensation by merging (and the other techniques) in this particular analysis. The instances of reordering also show how sometimes the order of the elements in a sentence should be switched from place despite the content staying the same, as that way they sound more natural in the TL, which is yet another way of showing how the translator needs to always put more focus of how the comprehensive the text is in TL, following its rules and features, as opposed to those from the SL.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that despite the fact that the registers in both remain formal and they feature the same lyrical language full of imagery, the language used in the TL version seems to be a more standard form of Spanish as opposed to the archaic and context-based English used in the ST. Using an equally archaic version of Spanish would not have been an effective translation decision as the target audience is Latin American and most likely would not be familiar with that register of Spanish, which would ultimately result in an ineffective rendering, as the readership would not be able to fully comprehend the narrative. It should also be considered that, as this is a fairy tale, it should be understandable for children as well, so using a more standard form of Spanish was certainly the most effective approach to render this text into the TL.

This annotated translation project has clearly shown that the work of the human translator is as necessary as it has ever been, as they need to be able to carefully take into account elements such as the context in which the work is set and the particular intricacies of different languages and how different are these from each other. This is something that machine translation is simply not developed enough to deal with yet, which means that the responsibility of spreading knowledge and culture from all over the world into as many languages as possible still lies solely on humans with the capacity for translation.

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## Source Text

# THE BOYHOOD OF FIONN

## I

Fionn [pronounce Fewn to rhyme with “tune”] got his first training among women. There is no wonder in that, for it is the pup’s mother teaches it to fight, and women know that fighting is a necessary art although men pretend there are others that are better. These were the women druids, Bovmall and Lia Luachra. It will be wondered why his own mother did not train him in the first natural savageries of existence, but she could not do it. She could not keep him with her for dread of the clann-Morna. The sons of Morna had been fighting and intriguing for a long time to oust her husband, Uail, from the captaincy of the Fianna of Ireland, and they had ousted him at last by killing him. It was the only way they could get rid of such a man; but it was not an easy way, for what Fionn’s father did not know in arms could not be taught to him even by Morna. Still, the hound that can wait will catch a hare at last, and even Manana’n sleeps. Fionn’s mother was beautiful, long-haired Muirne: so she is always referred to. She was the daughter of Teigue, the son of Nuada from Faery, and her mother was Ethlinn. That is, her brother was Lugh of the Long Hand himself, and with a god, and such a god, for brother we may marvel that she could have been in dread of Morna or his sons, or of any one. But women have strange loves, strange fears, and these are so bound up with one another that the thing which is presented to us is not often the thing that is to be seen.

However it may be, when Uail died Muirne got married again to the King of Kerry. She gave the child to Bovmall and Lia Luachra to rear, and we may be sure that she gave injunctions with him, and many of them. The youngster was brought to the woods of Slieve Bloom and was nursed there in secret.

It is likely the women were fond of him, for other than Fionn there was no life about them. He would be their life; and their eyes may have seemed as twin benedictions

resting on the small fair head. He was fair-haired, and it was for his fairness that he was afterwards called Fionn; but at this period he was known as Deimne. They saw the food they put into his little frame reproduce itself length-ways and sideways in tough inches, and in springs and energies that crawled at first, and then toddled, and then ran. He had birds for playmates, but all the creatures that live in a wood must have been his comrades. There would have been for little Fionn long hours of lonely sunshine, when the world seemed just sunshine and a sky. There would have been hours as long, when existence passed like a shade among shadows, in the multitudinous tappings of rain that dripped from leaf to leaf in the wood, and slipped so to the ground. He would have known little snaky paths, narrow enough to be filled by his own small feet, or a goat's; and he would have wondered where they went, and have marvelled again to find that, wherever they went, they came at last, through loops and twists of the branchy wood, to his own door. He may have thought of his own door as the beginning and end of the world, whence all things went, and whither all things came.

Perhaps he did not see the lark for a long time, but he would have heard him, far out of sight in the endless sky, thrilling and thrilling until the world seemed to have no other sound but that clear sweetness; and what a world it was to make that sound! Whistles and chirps, coos and caws and croaks, would have grown familiar to him. And he could at last have told which brother of the great brotherhood was making the noise he heard at any moment. The wind too: he would have listened to its thousand voices as it moved in all seasons and in all moods. Perhaps a horse would stray into the thick screen about his home, and would look as solemnly on Fionn as Fionn did on it. Or, coming suddenly on him, the horse might stare, all a-cock with eyes and ears and nose, one long-drawn facial extension, ere he turned and bounded away with manes all over him and hoofs all under him and tails all round him. A solemn-nosed, stern-eyed cow would amble and stamp in his wood to find a flyless shadow; or a strayed sheep would poke its gentle muzzle through leaves.

"A boy," he might think, as he stared on a staring horse, "a boy cannot wag his tail to keep the flies off," and that lack may have saddened him. He may have thought that a



cow can snort and be dignified at the one moment, and that timidity is comely in a sheep. He would have scolded the jackdaw, and tried to out-whistle the throstle, and wondered why his pipe got tired when the blackbird's didn't. There would be flies to be watched, slender atoms in yellow gauze that flew, and filmy specks that flittered, and sturdy, thick-ribbed brutes that pounced like cats and bit like dogs and flew like lightning. He may have mourned for the spider in bad luck who caught that fly. There would be much to see and remember and compare, and there would be, always, his two guardians. The flies change from second to second; one cannot tell if this bird is a visitor or an inhabitant, and a sheep is just sister to a sheep; but the women were as rooted as the house itself.

## II

Were his nurses comely or harsh-looking? Fionn would not know. This was the one who picked him up when he fell, and that was the one who patted the bruise. This one said: "Mind you do not tumble in the well!"

And that one: "Mind the little knees among the nettles."

But he did tumble and record that the only notable thing about a well is that it is wet. And as for nettles, if they hit him he hit back. He slashed into them with a stick and brought them low. There was nothing in wells or nettles, only women dreaded them. One patronised women and instructed them and comforted them, for they were afraid about one.

They thought that one should not climb a tree!

"Next week," they said at last, "you may climb this one," and "next week" lived at the end of the world!

But the tree that was climbed was not worth while when it had been climbed twice. There was a bigger one near by. There were trees that no one could climb, with vast shadow on one side and vaster sunshine on the other. It took a long time to walk round them, and you could not see their tops.

It was pleasant to stand on a branch that swayed and sprung, and it was good to stare at an impenetrable roof of leaves and then climb into it. How wonderful the loneliness was up there! When he looked down there was an undulating floor of leaves, green and green and greener to a very blackness of greeniness; and when he looked up there were leaves again, green and less green and not green at all, up to a very snow and blindness of greeniness; and above and below and around there was sway and motion,

the whisper of leaf on leaf, and the eternal silence to which one listened and at which one tried to look.

When he was six years of age his mother, beautiful, long-haired Muirne, came to see him. She came secretly, for she feared the sons of Morna, and she had paced through lonely places in many counties before she reached the hut in the wood, and the cot where he lay with his fists shut and sleep gripped in them.

He awakened to be sure. He would have one ear that would catch an unusual voice, one eye that would open, however sleepy the other one was. She took him in her arms and kissed him, and she sang a sleepy song until the small boy slept again.

We may be sure that the eye that could stay open stayed open that night as long as it could, and that the one ear listened to the sleepy song until the song got too low to be heard, until it was too tender to be felt vibrating along those soft arms, until Fionn was asleep again, with a new picture in his little head and a new notion to ponder on.

The mother of himself! His own mother!

But when he awakened she was gone.

She was going back secretly, in dread of the sons of Morna, slipping through gloomy woods, keeping away from habitations, getting by desolate and lonely ways to her lord in Kerry.

Perhaps it was he that was afraid of the sons of Morna, and perhaps she loved him.

### III

The women Druids, his guardians, belonged to his father's people. Bovmall was Uail's sister, and, consequently, Fionn's aunt. Only such a blood-tie could have bound them to the clann-Baiscne, for it is not easy, having moved in the world of court and camp, to go hide with a baby in a wood; and to live, as they must have lived, in terror.

What stories they would have told the child of the sons of Morna. Of Morna himself, the huge-shouldered, stern-eyed, violent Connachtman; and of his sons—young Goll Mor mac Morna in particular, as huge-shouldered as his father, as fierce in the onset, but merry-eyed when the other was grim, and bubbling with a laughter that made men forgive even his butcheries. Of Cona'n Mael mac Morna his brother, gruff as a badger, bearded like a boar, bald as a crow, and with a tongue that could manage an insult where another man would not find even a stammer. His boast was that when he saw an open door he went into it, and when he saw a closed door he went into it. When he saw a peaceful man he insulted him, and when he met a man who was not peaceful he insulted him. There was Garra Duv mac Morna, and savage Art Og, who cared as little for their own skins as they did for the next man's, and Garra must have been rough indeed to have earned in that clan the name of the Rough mac Morna. There were others: wild Connachtmen all, as untameable, as unaccountable as their own wonderful countryside.

Fionn would have heard much of them, and it is likely that he practised on a nettle at taking the head off Goll, and that he hunted a sheep from cover in the implacable manner he intended later on for Cona'n the Swearer.

But it is of Uail mac Baiscne he would have heard most. With what a dilation of spirit the ladies would have told tales of him, Fionn's father. How their voices would have become a chant as feat was added to feat, glory piled on glory. The most famous of men and the most beautiful; the hardest fighter; the easiest giver; the kingly champion; the chief of the Fianna na h-Eirinn. Tales of how he had been way-laid and got free; of how he had

been generous and got free; of how he had been angry and went marching with the speed of an eagle and the direct onfall of a storm; while in front and at the sides, angled from the prow of his terrific advance, were fleeing multitudes who did not dare to wait and scarce had time to run. And of how at last, when the time came to quell him, nothing less than the whole might of Ireland was sufficient for that great downfall.

We may be sure that on these adventures Fionn was with his father, going step for step with the long-striding hero, and heartening him mightily.

#### IV

He was given good training by the women in running and leaping and swimming.

One of them would take a thorn switch in her hand, and Fionn would take a thorn switch in his hand, and each would try to strike the other running round a tree.

You had to go fast to keep away from the switch behind, and a small boy feels a switch. Fionn would run his best to get away from that prickly stinger, but how he would run when it was his turn to deal the strokes!

With reason too, for his nurses had suddenly grown implacable. They pursued him with a savagery which he could not distinguish from hatred, and they swished him well whenever they got the chance.

Fionn learned to run. After a while he could buzz around a tree like a maddened fly, and oh, the joy, when he felt himself drawing from the switch and gaining from behind on its bearer! How he strained and panted to catch on that pursuing person and pursue her and get his own switch into action.

He learned to jump by chasing hares in a bumpy field. Up went the hare and up went Fionn, and away with the two of them, hopping and popping across the field. If the hare turned while Fionn was after her it was switch for Fionn; so that in a while it did not matter to Fionn which way the hare jumped for he could jump that way too. Long-ways, sideways or baw-ways, Fionn hopped where the hare hopped, and at last he was the owner of a hop that any hare would give an ear for.

He was taught to swim, and it may be that his heart sank when he fronted the lesson. The water was cold. It was deep. One could see the bottom, leagues below, millions of miles

below. A small boy might shiver as he stared into that wink and blink and twink of brown pebbles and murder. And these implacable women threw him in!

Perhaps he would not go in at first. He may have smiled at them, and coaxed, and hung back. It was a leg and an arm gripped then; a swing for Fionn, and out and away with him; plop and flop for him; down into chill deep death for him, and up with a splutter; with a sob; with a grasp at everything that caught nothing; with a wild flurry; with a raging despair; with a bubble and snort as he was hauled again down, and down, and down, and found as suddenly that he had been hauled out.

Fionn learned to swim until he could pop into the water like an otter and slide through it like an eel.

He used to try to chase a fish the way he chased hares in the bumpy field—but there are terrible spurts in a fish. It may be that a fish cannot hop, but he gets there in a flash, and he isn't there in another. Up or down, sideways or endways, it is all one to a fish. He goes and is gone. He twists this way and disappears the other way. He is over you when he ought to be under you, and he is biting your toe when you thought you were biting his tail.

You cannot catch a fish by swimming, but you can try, and Fionn tried. He got a grudging commendation from the terrible women when he was able to slip noiselessly in the tide, swim under water to where a wild duck was floating and grip it by the leg.

“Qu—,” said the duck, and he disappeared before he had time to get the “-ack” out of him.

So the time went, and Fionn grew long and straight and tough like a sapling; limber as a willow, and with the flirt and spring of a young bird. One of the ladies may have said, “He is shaping very well, my dear,” and the other replied, as is the morose privilege of an aunt, “He will never be as good as his father,” but their hearts must have overflowed in the

night, in the silence, in the darkness, when they thought of the living swiftness they had fashioned, and that dear fair head.



One day his guardians were agitated: they held confabulations at which Fionn was not permitted to assist. A man who passed by in the morning had spoken to them. They fed the man, and during his feeding Fionn had been shooed from the door as if he were a chicken. When the stranger took his road the women went with him a short distance. As they passed the man lifted a hand and bent a knee to Fionn.

“My soul to you, young master,” he said, and as he said it, Fionn knew that he could have the man’s soul, or his boots, or his feet, or anything that belonged to him.

When the women returned they were mysterious and whispery. They chased Fionn into the house, and when they got him in they chased him out again. They chased each other around the house for another whisper. They calculated things by the shape of clouds, by lengths of shadows, by the flight of birds, by two flies racing on a flat stone, by throwing bones over their left shoulders, and by every kind of trick and game and chance that you could put a mind to.

They told Fionn he must sleep in a tree that night, and they put him under bonds not to sing or whistle or cough or sneeze until the morning.

Fionn did sneeze. He never sneezed so much in his life. He sat up in his tree and nearly sneezed himself out of it. Flies got up his nose, two at a time, one up each nose, and his head nearly fell off the way he sneezed.

“You are doing that on purpose,” said a savage whisper from the foot of the tree.

But Fionn was not doing it on purpose. He tucked himself into a fork the way he had been taught, and he passed the crawliest, tickliest night he had ever known. After a while he did not want to sneeze, he wanted to scream: and in particular he wanted to come down from the tree. But he did not scream, nor did he leave the tree. His word was passed, and he stayed in his tree as silent as a mouse and as watchful, until he fell out of it.

In the morning a band of travelling poets were passing, and the women handed Fionn over to them. This time they could not prevent him overhearing.

“The sons of Morna!” they said.

And Fionn’s heart might have swelled with rage, but that it was already swollen with adventure. And also the expected was happening. Behind every hour of their day and every moment of their lives lay the sons of Morna. Fionn had run after them as deer: he jumped after them as hares: he dived after them as fish. They lived in the house with him: they sat at the table and ate his meat. One dreamed of them, and they were expected in the morning as the sun is. They knew only too well that the son of Uail was living, and they knew that their own sons would know no ease while that son lived; for they believed in those days that like breeds like, and that the son of Uail would be Uail with additions.

His guardians knew that their hiding-place must at last be discovered, and that, when it was found, the sons of Morna would come. They had no doubt of that, and every action of their lives was based on that certainty. For no secret can remain secret. Some broken soldier tramping home to his people will find it out; a herd seeking his strayed cattle or a band of travelling musicians will get the wind of it. How many people will move through even the remotest wood in a year! The crows will tell a secret if no one else does; and under a bush, behind a clump of bracken, what eyes may there not be! But if your secret is legged like a young goat! If it is tongued like a wolf! One can hide a baby, but you cannot hide a boy. He will rove unless you tie him to a post, and he will whistle then.

The sons of Morna came, but there were only two grim women living in a lonely hut to greet them. We may be sure they were well greeted. One can imagine Goll’s merry stare taking in all that could be seen; Cona’n’s grim eye raking the women’s faces while his tongue raked them again; the Rough mac Morna shouldering here and there in the house

and about it, with maybe a hatchet in his hand, and Art Og coursing further afield and vowing that if the cub was there he would find him.

## VI

But Fionn was gone. He was away, bound with his band of poets for the Galtees.

It is likely they were junior poets come to the end of a year's training, and returning to their own province to see again the people at home, and to be wondered at and exclaimed at as they exhibited bits of the knowledge which they had brought from the great schools. They would know tags of rhyme and tricks about learning which Fionn would hear of; and now and again, as they rested in a glade or by the brink of a river, they might try their lessons over. They might even refer to the ogham wands on which the first words of their tasks and the opening lines of poems were cut; and it is likely that, being new to these things, they would talk of them to a youngster, and, thinking that his wits could be no better than their own, they might have explained to him how ogham was written. But it is far more likely that his women guardians had already started him at those lessons.

Still this band of young bards would have been of infinite interest to Fionn, not on account of what they had learned, but because of what they knew. All the things that he should have known as by nature: the look, the movement, the feeling of crowds; the shouldering and intercourse of man with man; the clustering of houses and how people bore themselves in and about them; the movement of armed men, and the homecoming look of wounds; tales of births, and marriages and deaths; the chase with its multitudes of men and dogs; all the noise, the dust, the excitement of mere living. These, to Fionn, new come from leaves and shadows and the dipple and dapple of a wood, would have seemed wonderful; and the tales they would have told of their masters, their looks, fads, severities, sillinesses, would have been wonderful also.

That band should have chattered like a rookery.

They must have been young, for one time a Leinsterman came on them, a great robber named Fiacuil mac Cona, and he killed the poets. He chopped them up and chopped

them down. He did not leave one poeten of them all. He put them out of the world and out of life, so that they stopped being, and no one could tell where they went or what had really happened to them; and it is a wonder indeed that one can do that to anything let alone a band. If they were not youngsters, the bold Fiacuil could not have managed them all. Or, perhaps, he too had a band, although the record does not say so; but kill them he did, and they died that way.

Fionn saw that deed, and his blood may have been cold enough as he watched the great robber coursing the poets as a wild dog rages in a flock. And when his turn came, when they were all dead, and the grim, red-handed man trod at him, Fionn may have shivered, but he would have shown his teeth and laid roundly on the monster with his hands. Perhaps he did that, and perhaps for that he was spared.

“Who are you?” roared the staring black-mouth with the red tongue squirming in it like a frisky fish.

“The son of Uail, son of Baiscne,” quoth hardy Fionn. And at that the robber ceased to be a robber, the murderer disappeared, the black-rimmed chasm packed with red fish and precipices changed to something else, and the round eyes that had been popping out of their sockets and trying to bite, changed also. There remained a laughing and crying and loving servant who wanted to tie himself into knots if that would please the son of his great captain. Fionn went home on the robber’s shoulder, and the robber gave great snorts and made great jumps and behaved like a first-rate horse. For this same Fiacuil was the husband of Bovmall, Fionn’s aunt. He had taken to the wilds when clann-Baiscne was broken, and he was at war with a world that had dared to kill his Chief.

## VII

A new life for Fionn in the robber's den that was hidden in a vast cold marsh.

A tricky place that would be, with sudden exits and even suddener entrances, and with damp, winding, spidery places to hoard treasure in, or to hide oneself in.

If the robber was a solitary he would, for lack of someone else, have talked greatly to Fionn. He would have shown his weapons and demonstrated how he used them, and with what slash he chipped his victim, and with what slice he chopped him. He would have told why a slash was enough for this man and why that man should be sliced. All men are masters when one is young, and Fionn would have found knowledge here also. He would have seen Fiacuil's great spear that had thirty rivets of Arabian gold in its socket, and that had to be kept wrapped up and tied down so that it would not kill people out of mere spitefulness. It had come from Faery, out of the Shi' of Aillen mac Midna, and it would be brought back again later on between the same man's shoulder-blades.

What tales that man could tell a boy, and what questions a boy could ask him. He would have known a thousand tricks, and because our instinct is to teach, and because no man can keep a trick from a boy, he would show them to Fionn.

There was the marsh too; a whole new life to be learned; a complicated, mysterious, dank, slippery, reedy, treacherous life, but with its own beauty and an allurement that could grow on one, so that you could forget the solid world and love only that which quaked and gurgled.

In this place you may swim. By this sign and this you will know if it is safe to do so, said Fiacuil mac Cona; but in this place, with this sign on it and that, you must not venture a toe.

But where Fionn would venture his toes his ears would follow.

There are coiling weeds down there, the robber counselled him; there are thin, tough, snaky binders that will trip you and grip you, that will pull you and will not let you go again until you are drowned; until you are swaying and swinging away below, with outstretched arms, with outstretched legs, with a face all stares and smiles and jockeyings, gripped in those leathery arms, until there is no more to be gripped of you even by them.

“Watch these and this and that,” Fionn would have been told, “and always swim with a knife in your teeth.”

He lived there until his guardians found out where he was and came after him. Fiacuil gave him up to them, and he was brought home again to the woods of Slieve Bloom, but he had gathered great knowledge and new supplenesses.

The sons of Morna left him alone for a long time. Having made their essay they grew careless.

“Let him be,” they said. “He will come to us when the time comes.”

But it is likely too that they had had their own means of getting information about him. How he shaped? what muscles he had? and did he spring clean from the mark or had he to get off with a push? Fionn stayed with his guardians and hunted for them. He could run a deer down and haul it home by the reluctant skull. “Come on, Goll,” he would say to his stag, or, lifting it over a tussock with a tough grip on the snout, “Are you coming, bald Cona’n, or shall I kick you in the neck?”

The time must have been nigh when he would think of taking the world itself by the nose, to haul it over tussocks and drag it into his pen; for he was of the breed in whom mastery is born, and who are good masters.

But reports of his prowess were getting abroad. Clann-Morna began to stretch itself uneasily, and, one day, his guardians sent him on his travels.

“It is best for you to leave us now,” they said to the tall stripling, “for the sons of Morna are watching again to kill you.”

The woods at that may have seemed haunted. A stone might sling at one from a tree-top; but from which tree of a thousand trees did it come? An arrow buzzing by one’s ear would slide into the ground and quiver there silently, menacingly, hinting of the brothers it had left in the quiver behind; to the right? to the left? how many brothers? in how many quivers...? Fionn was a woodsman, but he had only two eyes to look with, one set of feet to carry him in one sole direction. But when he was looking to the front what, or how many whats, could be staring at him from the back? He might face in this direction, away from, or towards a smile on a hidden face and a finger on a string. A lance might slide at him from this bush or from the one yonder.. In the night he might have fought them; his ears against theirs; his noiseless feet against their lurking ones; his knowledge of the wood against their legion: but during the day he had no chance.

Fionn went to seek his fortune, to match himself against all that might happen, and to carve a name for himself that will live while Time has an ear and knows an Irishman.



## VIII

Fionn went away, and now he was alone. But he was as fitted for loneliness as the crane is that haunts the solitudes and bleak wastes of the sea; for the man with a thought has a comrade, and Fionn's mind worked as fealty as his body did. To be alone was no trouble to him who, however surrounded, was to be lonely his life long; for this will be said of Fionn when all is said, that all that came to him went from him, and that happiness was never his companion for more than a moment.

But he was not now looking for loneliness. He was seeking the instruction of a crowd, and therefore when he met a crowd he went into it. His eyes were skilled to observe in the moving dusk and dapple of green woods. They were trained to pick out of shadows birds that were themselves dun-coloured shades, and to see among trees the animals that are coloured like the bark of trees. The hare crouching in the fronds was visible to him, and the fish that swayed in-visibly in the sway and flicker of a green bank. He would see all that was to be seen, and he would see all that is passed by the eye that is half blind from use and wont.

At Moy Life' he came on lads swimming in a pool; and, as he looked on them sporting in the flush tide, he thought that the tricks they performed were not hard for him, and that he could have shown them new ones.

Boys must know what another boy can do, and they will match themselves against everything. They did their best under these observing eyes, and it was not long until he was invited to compete with them and show his mettle. Such an invitation is a challenge; it is almost, among boys, a declaration of war. But Fionn was so far beyond them in swimming that even the word master did not apply to that superiority.

While he was swimming one remarked: "He is fair and well shaped," and thereafter he was called "Fionn" or the Fair One. His name came from boys, and will, perhaps, be preserved by them.

He stayed with these lads for some time, and it may be that they idolised him at first, for it is the way with boys to be astounded and enraptured by feats; but in the end, and that was inevitable, they grew jealous of the stranger. Those who had been the champions before he came would marshal each other, and, by social pressure, would muster all the others against him; so that in the end not a friendly eye was turned on Fionn in that assembly. For not only did he beat them at swimming, he beat their best at running and jumping, and when the sport degenerated into violence, as it was bound to, the roughness of Fionn would be ten times as rough as the roughness of the roughest rough they could put forward. Bravery is pride when one is young, and Fionn was proud.

There must have been anger in his mind as he went away leaving that lake behind him, and those snarling and scowling boys, but there would have been disappointment also, for his desire at this time should have been towards friendliness.

He went thence to Lock Le'in and took service with the King of Finntraigh. That kingdom may have been thus called from Fionn himself and would have been known by another name when he arrived there.

He hunted for the King of Finntraigh, and it soon grew evident that there was no hunter in his service to equal Fionn. More, there was no hunter of them all who even distantly approached him in excellence. The others ran after deer, using the speed of their legs, the noses of their dogs and a thousand well-worn tricks to bring them within reach, and, often enough, the animal escaped them. But the deer that Fionn got the track of did not get away, and it seemed even that the animals sought him so many did he catch.

The king marvelled at the stories that were told of this new hunter, but as kings are greater than other people so they are more curious; and, being on the plane of excellence, they must see all that is excellently told of.

The king wished to see him, and Fionn must have wondered what the king thought as that gracious lord looked on him. Whatever was thought, what the king said was as direct in utterance as it was in observation.

“If Uail the son of Baiscne has a son,” said the king, “you would surely be that son.”

We are not told if the King of Finntraigh said anything more, but we know that Fionn left his service soon afterwards.

He went southwards and was next in the employment of the King of Kerry, the same lord who had married his own mother. In that service he came to such consideration that we hear of him as playing a match of chess with the king, and by this game we know that he was still a boy in his mind however mightily his limbs were spreading. Able as he was in sports and huntings, he was yet too young to be politic, but he remained impolitic to the end of his days, for whatever he was able to do he would do, no matter who was offended thereat; and whatever he was not able to do he would do also. That was Fionn.

Once, as they rested on a chase, a debate arose among the Fianna-Finn as to what was the finest music in the world.

“Tell us that,” said Fionn turning to Oisi’n [pronounced Usheen]

“The cuckoo calling from the tree that is highest in the hedge,” cried his merry son.

“A good sound,” said Fionn. “And you, Oscar,” he asked, “what is to your mind the finest of music?”

“The top of music is the ring of a spear on a shield,” cried the stout lad.

“It is a good sound,” said Fionn. And the other champions told their delight; the belling of a stag across water, the baying of a tuneful pack heard in the distance, the song of a lark, the laugh of a gleeful girl, or the whisper of a moved one.

“They are good sounds all,” said Fionn.

“Tell us, chief,” one ventured, “what you think?”

“The music of what happens,” said great Fionn, “that is the finest music in the world.”

He loved “what happened,” and would not evade it by the swerve of a hair; so on this occasion what was occurring he would have occur, although a king was his rival and his master. It may be that his mother was watching the match and that he could not but exhibit his skill before her. He committed the enormity of winning seven games in succession from the king himself!!!

It is seldom indeed that a subject can beat a king at chess, and this monarch was properly amazed.

“Who are you at all?” he cried, starting back from the chessboard and staring on Fionn.

“I am the son of a countryman of the Luigne of Tara,” said Fionn.

He may have blushed as he said it, for the king, possibly for the first time, was really looking at him, and was looking back through twenty years of time as he did so. The observation of a king is faultless—it is proved a thousand times over in the tales, and this king’s equipment was as royal as the next.

“You are no such son,” said the indignant monarch, “but you are the son that Muirne my wife bore to Uall mac Balscne.”

And at that Fionn had no more to say; but his eyes may have flown to his mother and stayed there.

“You cannot remain here,” his step-father continued. “I do not want you killed under my protection,” he explained, or complained.

Perhaps it was on Fionn’s account he dreaded the sons of Morna, but no one knows what Fionn thought of him for he never thereafter spoke of his step-father. As for Muirne she must have loved her lord; or she may have been terrified in truth of the sons of Morna and for Fionn; but it is so also, that if a woman loves her second husband she can dislike all that reminds her of the first one. Fionn went on his travels again.

## IX

All desires save one are fleeting, but that one lasts for ever. Fionn, with all desires, had the lasting one, for he would go anywhere and forsake anything for wisdom; and it was in search of this that he went to the place where Finegas lived on a bank of the Boyne Water. But for dread of the clann-Morna he did not go as Fionn. He called himself Deimne on that journey.

We get wise by asking questions, and even if these are not answered we get wise, for a well-packed question carries its answer on its back as a snail carries its shell. Fionn asked every question he could think of, and his master, who was a poet, and so an honourable man, answered them all, not to the limit of his patience, for it was limitless, but to the limit of his ability.

“Why do you live on the bank of a river?” was one of these questions. “Because a poem is a revelation, and it is by the brink of running water that poetry is revealed to the mind.”

“How long have you been here?” was the next query. “Seven years,” the poet answered.

“It is a long time,” said wondering Fionn.

“I would wait twice as long for a poem,” said the inveterate bard.

“Have you caught good poems?” Fionn asked him.

“The poems I am fit for,” said the mild master. “No person can get more than that, for a man’s readiness is his limit.”

“Would you have got as good poems by the Shannon or the Suir or by sweet Ana Life’?”

“They are good rivers,” was the answer. “They all belong to good gods.”

“But why did you choose this river out of all the rivers?”

Finegas beamed on his pupil.

“I would tell you anything,” said he, “and I will tell you that.”

Fionn sat at the kindly man’s feet, his hands absent among tall grasses, and listening with all his ears. “A prophecy was made to me,” Finegas began. “A man of knowledge foretold that I should catch the Salmon of Knowledge in the Boyne Water.”

“And then?” said Fionn eagerly.

“Then I would have All Knowledge.”

“And after that?” the boy insisted.

“What should there be after that?” the poet retorted.

“I mean, what would you do with All Knowledge?”

“A weighty question,” said Finegas smilingly. “I could answer it if I had All Knowledge, but not until then. What would you do, my dear?”

“I would make a poem,” Fionn cried.

"I think too," said the poet, "that that is what would be done."

In return for instruction Fionn had taken over the service of his master's hut, and as he went about the household duties, drawing the water, lighting the fire, and carrying rushes for the floor and the beds, he thought over all the poet had taught him, and his mind dwelt on the rules of metre, the cunningness of words, and the need for a clean, brave mind. But in his thousand thoughts he yet remembered the Salmon of Knowledge as eagerly as his master did. He already venerated Finegas for his great learning, his poetic skill, for an hundred reasons; but, looking on him as the ordained eater of the Salmon of Knowledge, he venerated him to the edge of measure. Indeed, he loved as well as venerated this master because of his unfailing kindness, his patience, his readiness to teach, and his skill in teaching.

"I have learned much from you, dear master," said Fionn gratefully.

"All that I have is yours if you can take it," the poet answered, "for you are entitled to all that you can take, but to no more than that. Take, so, with both hands."

"You may catch the salmon while I am with you," the hopeful boy mused. "Would not that be a great happening!" and he stared in ecstasy across the grass at those visions which a boy's mind knows.

"Let us pray for that," said Finegas fervently.

"Here is a question," Fionn continued. "How does this salmon get wisdom into his flesh?"

"There is a hazel bush overhanging a secret pool in a secret place. The Nuts of Knowledge drop from the Sacred Bush into the pool, and as they float, a salmon takes them in his mouth and eats them."



“It would be almost as easy,” the boy submitted, “if one were to set on the track of the Sacred Hazel and eat the nuts straight from the bush.”

“That would not be very easy,” said the poet, “and yet it is not as easy as that, for the bush can only be found by its own knowledge, and that knowledge can only be got by eating the nuts, and the nuts can only be got by eating the salmon.”

“We must wait for the salmon,” said Fionn in a rage of resignation.

## X

Life continued for him in a round of timeless time, wherein days and nights were uneventful and were yet filled with interest. As the day packed its load of strength into his frame, so it added its store of knowledge to his mind, and each night sealed the twain, for it is in the night that we make secure what we have gathered in the day.

If he had told of these days he would have told of a succession of meals and sleeps, and of an endless conversation, from which his mind would now and again slip away to a solitude of its own, where, in large hazy atmospheres, it swung and drifted and reposed. Then he would be back again, and it was a pleasure for him to catch up on the thought that was forward and re-create for it all the matter he had missed. But he could not often make these sleepy sallies; his master was too experienced a teacher to allow any such bright-faced, eager-eyed abstractions, and as the druid women had switched his legs around a tree, so Finegas chased his mind, demanding sense in his questions and understanding in his replies.

To ask questions can become the laziest and wobbliest occupation of a mind, but when you must yourself answer the problem that you have posed, you will meditate your question with care and frame it with precision. Fionn's mind learned to jump in a bumpier field than that in which he had chased rabbits. And when he had asked his question, and given his own answer to it, Finegas would take the matter up and make clear to him where the query was badly formed or at what point the answer had begun to go astray, so that Fionn came to understand by what successions a good question grows at last to a good answer.

One day, not long after the conversation told of, Finegas came to the place where Fionn was. The poet had a shallow osier basket on his arm, and on his face there was a look that was at once triumphant and gloomy. He was excited certainly, but he was sad also, and as he stood gazing on Fionn his eyes were so kind that the boy was touched, and

they were yet so melancholy that it almost made Fionn weep. "What is it, my master?" said the alarmed boy.

The poet placed his osier basket on the grass.

"Look in the basket, dear son," he said. Fionn looked.

"There is a salmon in the basket."

"It is The Salmon," said Finegas with a great sigh. Fionn leaped for delight.

"I am glad for you, master," he cried. "Indeed I am glad for you."

"And I am glad, my dear soul," the master rejoined.

But, having said it, he bent his brow to his hand and for a long time he was silent and gathered into himself.

"What should be done now?" Fionn demanded, as he stared on the beautiful fish.

Finegas rose from where he sat by the osier basket.

"I will be back in a short time," he said heavily. "While I am away you may roast the salmon, so that it will be ready against my return."

"I will roast it indeed," said Fionn.

The poet gazed long and earnestly on him.

“You will not eat any of my salmon while I am away?” he asked.

“I will not eat the littlest piece,” said Fionn.

“I am sure you will not,” the other murmured, as he turned and walked slowly across the grass and behind the sheltering bushes on the ridge.

Fionn cooked the salmon. It was beautiful and tempting and savoury as it smoked on a wooden platter among cool green leaves; and it looked all these to Finegas when he came from behind the fringing bushes and sat in the grass outside his door. He gazed on the fish with more than his eyes. He looked on it with his heart, with his soul in his eyes, and when he turned to look on Fionn the boy did not know whether the love that was in his eyes was for the fish or for himself. Yet he did know that a great moment had arrived for the poet.

“So,” said Finegas, “you did not eat it on me after all?” “Did I not promise?” Fionn replied.

“And yet,” his master continued, “I went away so that you might eat the fish if you felt you had to.”

“Why should I want another man’s fish?” said proud Fionn.

“Because young people have strong desires. I thought you might have tasted it, and then you would have eaten it on me.”

“I did taste it by chance,” Fionn laughed, “for while the fish was roasting a great blister rose on its skin. I did not like the look of that blister, and I pressed it down with my thumb.

That burned my thumb, so I popped it in my mouth to heal the smart. If your salmon tastes as nice as my thumb did," he laughed, "it will taste very nice."

"What did you say your name was, dear heart?" the poet asked.

"I said my name was Deimne."

"Your name is not Deimne," said the mild man, "your name is Fionn."

"That is true," the boy answered, "but I do not know how you know it."

"Even if I have not eaten the Salmon of Knowledge I have some small science of my own."

"It is very clever to know things as you know them," Fionn replied wonderingly. "What more do you know of me, dear master?"

"I know that I did not tell you the truth," said the heavy-hearted man.

"What did you tell me instead of it?"

"I told you a lie."

"It is not a good thing to do," Fionn admitted. "What sort of a lie was the lie, master?" "I told you that the Salmon of Knowledge was to be caught by me, according to the prophecy."

"Yes."

“That was true indeed, and I have caught the fish. But I did not tell you that the salmon was not to be eaten by me, although that also was in the prophecy, and that omission was the lie.”

“It is not a great lie,” said Fionn soothingly.

“It must not become a greater one,” the poet replied sternly.

“Who was the fish given to?” his companion wondered.

“It was given to you,” Finegas answered. “It was given to Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Baiscne, and it will be given to him.”

“You shall have a half of the fish,” cried Fionn.

“I will not eat a piece of its skin that is as small as the point of its smallest bone,” said the resolute and trembling bard. “Let you now eat up the fish, and I shall watch you and give praise to the gods of the Underworld and of the Elements.”

Fionn then ate the Salmon of Knowledge, and when it had disappeared a great jollity and tranquillity and exuberance returned to the poet.

“Ah,” said he, “I had a great combat with that fish.”

“Did it fight for its life?” Fionn inquired.

“It did, but that was not the fight I meant.”

“You shall eat a Salmon of Knowledge too,” Fionn assured him.

“You have eaten one,” cried the blithe poet, “and if you make such a promise it will be because you know.”

“I promise it and know it,” said Fionn, “you shall eat a Salmon of Knowledge yet.”

## XI

He had received all that he could get from Finegas. His education was finished and the time had come to test it, and to try all else that he had of mind and body. He bade farewell to the gentle poet, and set out for Tara of the Kings.

It was Samhain-tide, and the feast of Tara was being held, at which all that was wise or skilful or well-born in Ireland were gathered together.

This is how Tara was when Tara was. There was the High King's palace with its fortification; without it was another fortification enclosing the four minor palaces, each of which was maintained by one of the four provincial kings; without that again was the great banqueting hall, and around it and enclosing all of the sacred hill in its gigantic bound ran the main outer ramparts of Tara. From it, the centre of Ireland, four great roads went, north, south, east, and west, and along these roads, from the top and the bottom and the two sides of Ireland, there moved for weeks before Samhain an endless stream of passengers.

Here a gay band went carrying rich treasure to decorate the pavilion of a Munster lord. On another road a vat of seasoned yew, monstrous as a house on wheels and drawn by an hundred laborious oxen, came bumping and joggling the ale that thirsty Connaught princes would drink. On a road again the learned men of Leinster, each with an idea in his head that would discomfit a northern ollav and make a southern one gape and fidget, would be marching solemnly, each by a horse that was piled high on the back and widely at the sides with clean-peeled willow or oaken wands, that were carved from the top to the bottom with the ogham signs; the first lines of poems (for it was an offence against wisdom to commit more than initial lines to writing), the names and dates of kings, the procession of laws of Tara and of the sub-kingdoms, the names of places and their meanings. On the brown stallion ambling peacefully yonder there might go the warring of the gods for two or ten thousand years; this mare with the dainty pace and the vicious eye might be sidling under a load of oaken odes in honour of her owner's family, with a



few bundles of tales of wonder added in case they might be useful; and perhaps the restive piebald was backing the history of Ireland into a ditch.

On such a journey all people spoke together, for all were friends, and no person regarded the weapon in another man's hand other than as an implement to poke a reluctant cow with, or to pacify with loud wallops some hoof-proud colt.

Into this teem and profusion of jolly humanity Fionn slipped, and if his mood had been as bellicose as a wounded boar he would yet have found no man to quarrel with, and if his eye had been as sharp as a jealous husband's he would have found no eye to meet it with calculation or menace or fear; for the Peace of Ireland was in being, and for six weeks man was neighbour to man, and the nation was the guest of the High King. Fionn went in with the notables.

His arrival had been timed for the opening day and the great feast of welcome. He may have marvelled, looking on the bright city, with its pillars of gleaming bronze and the roofs that were painted in many colours, so that each house seemed to be covered by the spreading wings of some gigantic and gorgeous bird. And the palaces themselves, mellow with red oak, polished within and without by the wear and the care of a thousand years, and carved with the patient skill of unending generations of the most famous artists of the most artistic country of the western world, would have given him much to marvel at also. It must have seemed like a city of dream, a city to catch the heart, when, coming over the great plain, Fionn saw Tara of the Kings held on its hill as in a hand to gather all the gold of the falling sun, and to restore a brightness as mellow and tender as that universal largess.

In the great banqueting hall everything was in order for the feast. The nobles of Ireland with their winsome consorts, the learned and artistic professions represented by the pick of their time were in place. The Ard-Ri, Corm of the Hundred Battles, had taken his place on the raised dais which commanded the whole of that vast hall. At his Right hand his son Art, to be afterwards as famous as his famous father, took his seat, and on his left

Goll mor mac Morna, chief of the Fianna of Ireland, had the seat of honour. As the High King took his place he could see every person who was noted in the land for any reason. He would know every one who was present, for the fame of all men is sealed at Tara, and behind his chair a herald stood to tell anything the king might not know or had forgotten.

Conn gave the signal and his guests seated themselves.

The time had come for the squires to take their stations behind their masters and mistresses. But, for the moment, the great room was seated, and the doors were held to allow a moment of respect to pass before the servers and squires came in.

Looking over his guests, Conn observed that a young man was yet standing.

“There is a gentleman,” he murmured, “for whom no seat has been found.”

We may be sure that the Master of the Banquet blushed at that.

“And,” the king continued, “I do not seem to know the young man.”

Nor did his herald, nor did the unfortunate Master, nor did anybody; for the eyes of all were now turned where the king’s went.

“Give me my horn,” said the gracious monarch.

The horn of state was put to his hand.

“Young gentleman,” he called to the stranger, “I wish to drink to your health and to welcome you to Tara.”

The young man came forward then, greater-shouldered than any mighty man of that gathering, longer and cleaner limbed, with his fair curls dancing about his beardless face. The king put the great horn into his hand.

“Tell me your name,” he commanded gently.

“I am Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Baiscne,” said the youth.

And at that saying a touch as of lightning went through the gathering so that each person quivered, and the son of the great, murdered captain looked by the king’s shoulder into the twinkling eye of Goll. But no word was uttered, no movement made except the movement and the utterance of the Ard-Ri’.

“You are the son of a friend,” said the great-hearted monarch. “You shall have the seat of a friend.”

He placed Fionn at the right hand of his own son Art.

## XII

It is to be known that on the night of the Feast of Samhain the doors separating this world and the next one are opened, and the inhabitants of either world can leave their respective spheres and appear in the world of the other beings.

Now there was a grandson to the Dagda Mor, the Lord of the Underworld, and he was named Aillen mac Midna, out of Shi' Finnachy, and this Aillen bore an implacable enmity to Tara and the Ard-Ri'.

As well as being monarch of Ireland her High King was chief of the people learned in magic, and it is possible that at some time Conn had adventured into Tir na n-Og, the Land of the Young, and had done some deed or misdeed in Aillen's lordship or in his family. It must have been an ill deed in truth, for it was in a very rage of revenge that Aillen came yearly at the permitted time to ravage Tara.

Nine times he had come on this mission of revenge, but it is not to be supposed that he could actually destroy the holy city: the Ard-Ri' and magicians could prevent that, but he could yet do a damage so considerable that it was worth Conn's while to take special extra precautions against him, including the precaution of chance.

Therefore, when the feast was over and the banquet had commenced, the Hundred Fighter stood from his throne and looked over his assembled people.

The Chain of Silence was shaken by the attendant whose duty and honour was the Silver Chain, and at that delicate chime the halt went silent, and a general wonder ensued as to what matter the High King would submit to his people.

“Friends and heroes,” said Conn, “Aillen, the son of Midna, will come to-night from Slieve Fuaid with occult, terrible fire against our city. Is there among you one who loves Tara and the king, and who will undertake our defence against that being?”

He spoke in silence, and when he had finished he listened to the same silence, but it was now deep, ominous, agonized. Each man glanced uneasily on his neighbour and then stared at his wine-cup or his fingers. The hearts of young men went hot for a gallant moment and were chilled in the succeeding one, for they had all heard of Aillen out of Shl Finnachy in the north. The lesser gentlemen looked under their brows at the greater champions, and these peered furtively at the greatest of all. Art og mac Morna of the Hard Strokes fell to biting his fingers, Cona’n the Swearer and Garra mac Morna grumbled irritably to each other and at their neighbours, even Caelte, the son of Rona’n, looked down into his own lap, and Goll Mor sipped at his wine without any twinkle in his eye. A horrid embarrassment came into the great hall, and as the High King stood in that palpitating silence his noble face changed from kindly to grave and from that to a terrible sternness. In another moment, to the undying shame of every person present, he would have been compelled to lift his own challenge and declare himself the champion of Tara for that night, but the shame that was on the faces of his people would remain in the heart of their king. Goll’s merry mind would help him to forget, but even his heart would be wrung by a memory that he would not dare to face. It was at that terrible moment that Fionn stood up.

“What,” said he, “will be given to the man who undertakes this defence?”

“All that can be rightly asked will be royally bestowed,” was the king’s answer.

“Who are the sureties?” said Fionn.

“The kings of Ireland, and Red Cith with his magicians.”

“I will undertake the defence,” said Fionn. And on that, the kings and magicians who were present bound themselves to the fulfilment of the bargain.

Fionn marched from the banqueting hall, and as he went, all who were present of nobles and retainers and servants acclaimed him and wished him luck. But in their hearts they were bidding him good-bye, for all were assured that the lad was marching to a death so unescapeable that he might already be counted as a dead man.

It is likely that Fionn looked for help to the people of the Shi' themselves, for, through his mother, he belonged to the tribes of Dana, although, on the father's side, his blood was well compounded with mortal clay. It may be, too, that he knew how events would turn, for he had eaten the Salmon of Knowledge. Yet it is not recorded that on this occasion he invoked any magical art as he did on other adventures.

Fionn's way of discovering whatever was happening and hidden was always the same and is many times referred to. A shallow, oblong dish of pure, pale gold was brought to him. This dish was filled with clear water. Then Fionn would bend his head and stare into the water, and as he stared he would place his thumb in his mouth under his “Tooth of Knowledge,” his “wisdom tooth.”

Knowledge, may it be said, is higher than magic and is more to be sought. It is quite possible to see what is happening and yet not know what is forward, for while seeing is believing it does not follow that either seeing or believing is knowing. Many a person can see a thing and believe a thing and know just as little about it as the person who does neither. But Fionn would see and know, or he would understand a decent ratio of his visions. That he was versed in magic is true, for he was ever known as the Knowledgeable man, and later he had two magicians in his household named Dirim and mac-Reith to do the rough work of knowledge for their busy master.

It was not from the Shi', however, that assistance came to Fionn.

### XIII

He marched through the successive fortifications until he came to the outer, great wall, the boundary of the city, and when he had passed this he was on the wide plain of Tara.

Other than himself no person was abroad, for on the night of the Feast of Samhain none but a madman would quit the shelter of a house even if it were on fire; for whatever disasters might be within a house would be as nothing to the calamities without it.

The noise of the banquet was not now audible to Fionn—it is possible, however, that there was a shamefaced silence in the great hall—and the lights of the city were hidden by the successive great ramparts. The sky was over him; the earth under him; and than these there was nothing, or there was but the darkness and the wind.

But darkness was not a thing to terrify him, bred in the nightness of a wood and the very fosterling of gloom; nor could the wind afflict his ear or his heart. There was no note in its orchestra that he had not brooded on and become, which becoming is magic. The long-drawn moan of it; the thrilling whisper and hush; the shrill, sweet whistle, so thin it can scarcely be heard, and is taken more by the nerves than by the ear; the screech, sudden as a devil's yell and loud as ten thunders; the cry as of one who flies with backward look to the shelter of leaves and darkness; and the sob as of one stricken with an age-long misery, only at times remembered, but remembered then with what a pang! His ear knew by what successions they arrived, and by what stages they grew and diminished. Listening in the dark to the bundle of noises which make a noise he could disentangle them and assign a place and a reason to each gradation of sound that formed the chorus: there was the patter of a rabbit, and there the scurrying of a hare; a bush rustled yonder, but that brief rustle was a bird; that pressure was a wolf, and this hesitation a fox; the scraping yonder was but a rough leaf against bark, and the scratching beyond it was a ferret's claw.

Fear cannot be where knowledge is, and Fionn was not fearful.

His mind, quietly busy on all sides, picked up one sound and dwelt on it. "A man," said Fionn, and he listened in that direction, back towards the city.

A man it was, almost as skilled in darkness as Fionn himself "This is no enemy," Fionn thought; "his walking is open."

"Who comes?" he called.

"A friend," said the newcomer.

"Give a friend's name," said Fionn.

"Fiacuil mac Cona," was the answer.

"Ah, my pulse and heart!" cried Fionn, and he strode a few paces to meet the great robber who had fostered him among the marshes.

"So you are not afraid," he said joyfully.

"I am afraid in good truth," Fiacuil whispered, "and the minute my business with you is finished I will trot back as quick as legs will carry me. May the gods protect my going as they protected my coming," said the robber piously.

"Amen," said Fionn, "and now, tell me what you have come for?"

"Have you any plan against this lord of the Shl?" Fiacuil whispered.



“I will attack him,” said Fionn.

“That is not a plan,” the other groaned, “we do not plan to deliver an attack but to win a victory.”

“Is this a very terrible person?” Fionn asked.

“Terrible indeed. No one can get near him or away from him. He comes out of the Shi’ playing sweet, low music on a timpan and a pipe, and all who hear this music fall asleep.”

“I will not fall asleep,” said Fionn.

“You will indeed, for everybody does.”

“What happens then?” Fionn asked.

“When all are asleep Aillen mac Midna blows a dart of fire out of his mouth, and everything that is touched by that fire is destroyed, and he can blow his fire to an incredible distance and to any direction.”

“You are very brave to come to help me,” Fionn murmured, “especially when you are not able to help me at all.”

“I can help,” Fiacuil replied, “but I must be paid.”

“What payment?”

“A third of all you earn and a seat at your council.”

“I grant that,” said Fionn, “and now, tell me your plan?”

“You remember my spear with the thirty rivets of Arabian gold in its socket?”

“The one,” Fionn queried, “that had its head wrapped in a blanket and was stuck in a bucket of water and was chained to a wall as well—the venomous Birgha?” “That one,” Fiacuil replied.

“It is Aillen mac Midna’s own spear,” he continued, “and it was taken out of his Shi’ by your father.”

“Well?” said Fionn, wondering nevertheless where Fiacuil got the spear, but too generous to ask.

“When you hear the great man of the Shi’ coming, take the wrappings off the head of the spear and bend your face over it; the heat of the spear, the stench of it, all its pernicious and acrid qualities will prevent you from going to sleep.”

“Are you sure of that?” said Fionn.

“You couldn’t go to sleep close to that stench; nobody could,” Fiacuil replied decidedly.

He continued: “Aillen mac Midna will be off his guard when he stops playing and begins to blow his fire; he will think everybody is asleep; then you can deliver the attack you were speaking of, and all good luck go with it.”

“I will give him back his spear,” said Fionn.

“Here it is,” said Fiacuil, taking the Birgha from under his cloak. “But be as careful of it, my pulse, be as frightened of it as you are of the man of Dana.”

“I will be frightened of nothing,” said Fionn, “and the only person I will be sorry for is that Aillen mac Midna, who is going to get his own spear back.”

“I will go away now,” his companion whispered, “for it is growing darker where you would have thought there was no more room for darkness, and there is an eerie feeling abroad which I do not like. That man from the Shi’ may come any minute, and if I catch one sound of his music I am done for.”

The robber went away and again Fionn was alone.

## XIV

He listened to the retreating footsteps until they could be heard no more, and the one sound that came to his tense ears was the beating of his own heart.

Even the wind had ceased, and there seemed to be nothing in the world but the darkness and himself. In that gigantic blackness, in that unseen quietude and vacancy, the mind could cease to be personal to itself. It could be overwhelmed and merged in space, so that consciousness would be transferred or dissipated, and one might sleep standing; for the mind fears loneliness more than all else, and will escape to the moon rather than be driven inwards on its own being.

But Fionn was not lonely, and he was not afraid when the son of Midna came.

A long stretch of the silent night had gone by, minute following minute in a slow sequence, wherein as there was no change there was no time; wherein there was no past and no future, but a stupefying, endless present which is almost the annihilation of consciousness. A change came then, for the clouds had also been moving and the moon at last was sensed behind them—not as a radiance, but as a percolation of light, a gleam that was strained through matter after matter and was less than the very wraith or remembrance of itself; a thing seen so narrowly, so sparsely, that the eye could doubt if it was or was not seeing, and might conceive that its own memory was re-creating that which was still absent.

But Fionn's eye was the eye of a wild creature that spies on darkness and moves there wittingly. He saw, then, not a thing but a movement; something that was darker than the darkness it loomed on; not a being but a presence, and, as it were, impending pressure. And in a little he heard the deliberate pace of that great being.

Fionn bent to his spear and unloosed its coverings.

Then from the darkness there came another sound; a low, sweet sound; thrillingly joyous, thrillingly low; so low the ear could scarcely note it, so sweet the ear wished to catch nothing else and would strive to hear it rather than all sounds that may be heard by man: the music of another world! the unearthly, dear melody of the Shi'! So sweet it was that the sense strained to it, and having reached must follow drowsily in its wake, and would merge in it, and could not return again to its own place until that strange harmony was finished and the ear restored to freedom.

But Fionn had taken the covering from his spear, and with his brow pressed close to it he kept his mind and all his senses engaged on that sizzling, murderous point.

The music ceased and Aillen hissed a fierce blue flame from his mouth, and it was as though he hissed lightning.

Here it would seem that Fionn used magic, for spreading out his fringed mantle he caught the flame. Rather he stopped it, for it slid from the mantle and sped down into the earth to the depth of twenty-six spans; from which that slope is still called the Glen of the Mantle, and the rise on which Aillen stood is known as the Ard of Fire.

One can imagine the surprise of Aillen mac Midna, seeing his fire caught and quenched by an invisible hand. And one can imagine that at this check he might be frightened, for who would be more terrified than a magician who sees his magic fail, and who, knowing of power, will guess at powers of which he has no conception and may well dread.

Everything had been done by him as it should be done. His pipe had been played and his timpan, all who heard that music should be asleep, and yet his fire was caught in full course and was quenched.

Aillen, with all the terrific strength of which he was master, blew again, and the great jet of blue flame came roaring and whistling from him and was caught and disappeared.

Panic swirled into the man from Faery; he turned from that terrible spot and fled, not knowing what might be behind, but dreading it as he had never before dreaded anything, and the unknown pursued him; that terrible defence became offence and hung to his heel as a wolf pads by the flank of a bull.

And Aillen was not in his own world! He was in the world of men, where movement is not easy and the very air a burden. In his own sphere, in his own element, he might have outrun Fionn, but this was Fionn's world, Fionn's element, and the flying god was not gross enough to outstrip him. Yet what a race he gave, for it was but at the entrance to his own Shi' that the pursuer got close enough. Fionn put a finger into the thong of the great spear, and at that cast night fell on Aillen mac Midna. His eyes went black, his mind whirled and ceased, there came nothingness where he had been, and as the Birgha whistled into his shoulder-blades he withered away, he tumbled emptily and was dead. Fionn took his lovely head from its shoulders and went back through the night to Tara.

Triumphant Fionn, who had dealt death to a god, and to whom death would be dealt, and who is now dead!

He reached the palace at sunrise.

On that morning all were astir early. They wished to see what destruction had been wrought by the great being, but it was young Fionn they saw and that redoubtable head swinging by its hair. "What is your demand?" said the Ard-Ri'. "The thing that it is right I should ask," said Fionn: "the command of the Fianna of Ireland."

“Make your choice,” said Conn to Goll Mor; “you will leave Ireland, or you will place your hand in the hand of this champion and be his man.”

Goll could do a thing that would be hard for another person, and he could do it so beautifully that he was not diminished by any action.

“Here is my hand,” said Goll.

And he twinkled at the stern, young eyes that gazed on him as he made his submission.

## Target Text

# LA JUVENTUD DE FIONN

## I

Fionn recibió su primer entrenamiento entre mujeres. Eso no es de sorprenderse, pues es la madre quien le enseña a pelear al crío y las mujeres saben bien que el combate es un arte necesario, a pesar de que los hombres quieran pretender que hay otras mejores. Estas eran las mujeres druidas, Bovmall y Lia Luachra. Es de cuestionarse porque su propia madre no lo entreno en los primeros salvajismos naturales de la existencia; ella simplemente no pudo hacerlo. No fue capaz de conservarlo junto a ella por temor al clan Morna. Los hijos de Morna habían estado planeando y peleando por un largo tiempo para remover a su esposo, Uail, de la capitania de la Fianna de Irlanda y finalmente habían logrado su cometido tras asesinarlo. Era la única manera en la que se pudieron deshacer de un hombre como él; pero no les resulto nada fácil, ya que lo que el padre de Fionn desconocía sobre la batalla no se lo podía ser enseñado ni por el mismo Morma. Aun así, el sabueso paciente eventualmente atrapara a la liebre, y hasta el mismo Manannán debe dormir. La madre de Fionn era una mujer hermosa y de cabello largo llamada Muirne: siempre se la describía de esa manera. Ella era la hija de Teigue, hijo de Nuada, y su madre era Ethlinn. También era hermano del mismísimo Lugh, lo cual lleva a cuestionarse como teniendo a un dios, y vaya dios que era, por hermano le podía tener temor a Morna o sus hijos, o a quien sea. Pero las mujeres tienes amores y temores extraños y estos se encuentran tan entrelazados el uno con el otro que lo que le nos presentan tiende a engañar a la vista.

Sea como fuere, tras la muerte de Uail, Muirne se volvió a casar; ahora con el Rey de Kerry. Le entrego al niño a Bovmall y a Lia Luachra para que lo criaran, y podemos estar seguros que recibieron con el mas de una disposición. El joven fue llevado a los bosques de Slieve Bloom y fue ahí donde fue criado en secreto.



Es probable que estas mujeres le tuvieran afecto, ya que aparte de Fionn no tenían razón para vivir. Él se convertiría en sus vidas; y los ojos de ellas pudieron haber parecido pares de bendiciones sobre esa cabeza pequeña y blanca. Su cabello era rubio y era por esa razón por la cual luego sería conocido como Fionn; pero en ese entonces se lo conocía como Deimne. Ellas vieron como la comida con que lo alimentaban se reproducía en su pequeño cuerpo, logrando que gane mayor tamaño tanto en altura como en contextura, y a su vez se transformaba en energía que en un principio se arrastraba, luego gateaba y luego corría. Los pájaros eran sus compañeros de juego, pero seguramente también se llevaba bien con todas las demás creaturas que vivían en el bosque. Debió haber habido largas horas de sol para el pequeño Fionn; en esos tiempos el mundo parecía ser simplemente un cielo con un sol solitario. Debió haber habido horas igual de largas, cuando la existencia pasaba como sombra entre las tinieblas, en las multitudinarias gotas de lluvia que se escurrían de hoja en hoja en el bosque y terminaban en el suelo. Debió haber conocido pequeños caminos serpenteantes, tan estrechos como para ser ocupados por sus pies diminutos, o los de una cabra y se debió haber preguntado a si mismo hacia a donde terminaban estos; seguramente se debió maravillar cuando descubrió que, sin importar hacia donde lo dirigían, con giros y vueltas entre las ramas del bosque, terminaban en la puerta de su casa. Es posible que haya pensado que esa puerta era el principio y el fin del mundo; de donde todo venía, y todo se iba.

Quizás no había visto a la alondra por un largo tiempo, pero la habría podido escuchar en ese cielo infinito, más lejos de lo que sus ojos podían ver, trinando y trinando hasta que el mundo parecía no tener otro sonido que aquella dulzura nítida; ¡Y vaya maravilla de mundo para que se emitiera tal sonido! Silbidos y chirridos, gorjeos, cacareos y croidos se convertirían en sonidos familiares para él y eventualmente sería capaz de reconocer que creatura de la madre naturaleza producía los sonidos que escuchaba en todo momento. De igual manera con el viento: pudo haber escuchado a sus miles de voces mientras este se movía entre temporadas y estados de ánimo. Quizás un caballo se perdería en el espeso pasto cerca de su casa y miraría a Fionn tan solemnemente como Fionn miraba a este. O quizás, acercándose a él de forma súbita, el caballo lo miraría detenidamente, parado firmemente con sus ojos, sus orejas y su nariz, una

expresión facial extensa, antes de dar la vuelta y partir con su melena, sus pezuñas y cola a su alrededor. Una vaca de nariz imponente y mirada firme se pasearía lenta y pesadamente por su bosque en búsqueda de una sombra inmóvil; o una oveja perdida movería gentilmente su hocico entre las ramas.

“Un niño,” podría haber pensado mientras miraba al caballo que lo miraba fijamente a él, “un niño no puede mover su cola para ahuyentar a las moscas,” y esa carencia lo pudo haber entristecido. Podría haber pensado que una vaca puede respirar de forma brusca y conservar su dignidad y que la timidez era una característica apropiada en una oveja. Hostigaría a la graja e intentaría silbar más fuerte que el tordo y se preguntaría porque perdía la respiración y el mirlo no. Podía observar todo tipo de moscas: pequeñas partículas de seda amarilla que flotaban en el aire, átomos que se movían ligeramente y bestias corpulentas que saltaban como gatos, mordían como perros y volaban como rayos.; lamentaría la mala suerte de la araña que atrapara a una mosca como esta. Había mucho para ver, para comparar, para recordar, y siempre estarían ahí con él sus dos protectoras. Las moscas van cambiando de segundo a segundo; es difícil diferenciar entre pájaros residentes o visitantes, y una oveja podía ser simplemente hermana de otra oveja; pero las mujeres estaban tan establecidas en ese lugar como la misma casa.

## II

¿Eran sus nodrizas de aspecto agradable o áspero? Fionn no lo sabía. Esta era la que lo levantaba cuando se caía y la otra era la que le curaba la herida. Una le decía: ¡Ten cuidado de no caerte al pozo!”

La otra decía: “¡Ten cuidado con tus rodillitas cuando estés entre las ortigas!

Pero si se cayó y se pudo dar cuenta que lo única cosa destacable de un pozo es que estaba mojado. En cuanto a las ortigas, si lo golpeaban, él les hacía lo mismo; las podaba con un palo hasta dejarlas cortas. No había motivo para temer a los pozos y las ortigas, solo las mujeres lo hacían. Uno debe ser condescendiente con las mujeres; instruir las y confortarlas, pues ellas se preocupaban por uno.

¡Pensaban que no se debía trepar a los árboles!

“La próxima semana,” dijeron finalmente, “te puedes trepar a este árbol,” pero ¡“la próxima semana” estaba a años luz!

Pero trepar ese árbol ya no valía la pena cuando se lo trepaba por segunda vez. Había uno más grande cerca. Había árboles que nadie podía trepar, tenían una sombra extensa de un lado y luz del sol aún más extensa del otro. Tomaba mucho tiempo caminar alrededor de estos y no se podía ver donde terminaban.

Era agradable pararse en una rama que se sacudía y se balanceaba y mirar fijamente hacia una copa de hojas impenetrables para luego treparse ahí se sentía bien. ¡Que maravillosa era la soledad allá arriba! Cuando miraba hacia abajo había un suelo ondulante de hojas que cada vez se iba haciendo más verde hasta convertirse en un negro verdoso; y cuando miraba hacia arriba podía ver hojas nuevamente, las cuales se iban haciendo cada vez menos verdes hasta convertirse en un verde blanquinoso y

cegador; y tanto hacia abajo como hacia arriba había movimiento y circulación, el susurro producido por el roce entre las hojas y el silencio eterno al cual uno escuchada e intentaba visualizar.

Cuando tenía seis años de edad, su madre, la hermosa Muirne, lo vino a visitar. Vino en secreto, pues temía a los hijos de Morna y había pasado por lugares solitarios entre muchas regiones antes de llegar a la choza en el bosque y a la pequeña cama donde él dormía con los puños apretados, con los cuales atrapaba el sueño.

Se despertó para estar seguro. Tenía una oreja con la cual escuchaba voces extrañas y un ojo que permanecía abierto, sin importar cuan soñoliento el otro se encuentre. Ella lo tomo en sus brazos, lo beso y le canto una canción de cuna hasta que el pequeño se durmiera nuevamente.

Podemos estar seguros de que el ojo que podía mantener abierto permaneció abierto lo más que pudo esa noche y que su oreja escucho la canción de cuna hasta que esta ya no se podía escuchar más, hasta que se volvió demasiado sensible como para sentir su vibración en esos brazos suaves, hasta que Fionn pudo dormir de nuevo, con una nueva imagen en su pequeña cabeza y una nueva noción con la cual reflexionar.

¡Era su madre! ¡Su propia madre!

Pero cuando se despertó ella ya se había ido.

Se regresó en secreto, con temor a los hijos de Morma, escurriéndose entre bosques melancólicos, manteniéndose alejada de las moradas, pasando por caminos solitarios y desolados hacia Kerry, donde la esperaba su esposo.

Quizás era el quien temía a los hijos de Morna, y quizás ella lo amaba.

### III

Las mujeres druidas, sus protectoras, pertenecían al pueblo su padre. Bovmall era hermana de Uail y, por consiguiente, tía de Fionn. Solo un lazo de sangre como ese los podía haber ligado al clan Baiscne, y no era nada fácil haber pasado de frecuentar en las cortes y los campos nobles a esconderse con un bebe en el bosque; y a vivir, como debieron haber vivido, con temor.

Que historias le habrían de contar al muchacho sobre los hijos de Morna. Sobre el mismísimo Morna; ese hombre violento, extremadamente corpulento, de mirada cruel, proveniente de Connatch; y sobre sus hijos- el joven Goll Mor mac Morna en particular, tan corpulento como su padre, con su misma ferocidad a la hora de atacar pero con la mirada alegre a diferencia de él y dotado con una carcajada que hacía que los hombres perdonaran incluso sus carnicerías. Sobre Conan Mael mac Morna, su hermano, tan brusco como un tejón, con una barba como la de un jabalí, tan calvo como un cuervo y con una lengua capaz de lanzar un insulto en situaciones en las que otro hombre no podría ni tartamudear. Se jactaba diciendo que cuando veía una puerta abierta, él entraba, pero cuando veía una puerta cerrada, también entraba. Cuando se encontraba con un hombre conflictivo, lo insultaba, pero cuando se encontraba con un hombre pacífico, también lo insultaba. También estaban Garra Duv mac Morna y el salvaje Art Og, a quienes les importaba tan poco la vida de otros hombres como las suyas; y Garra sin duda alguna debía ser cruel para que el clan le haya otorgado el apodo de él Cruel mac Morna. Habían más: todos hombres salvajes de Connatch, tan indomables e impredecibles como el mismo campo maravilloso del que provenían.

Fionn habría escuchado mucho sobre ellos y es probable que haya cortado una ortiga pretendiendo que era la cabeza de Goll y que haya cazado a una oveja de la misma manera implacable en la que pretendía hacerlo con Conan algún día.

Pero era de Uail mac Baiscne de quien habría escuchado más. Las nodrizas le habrían de contar historias sobre su padre con sus espíritus enaltecidos; sus voces se

transformaban en cantos mientras relataban sobre sus logros y sus proezas llenas de gloria. Era el hombre más famoso y el más hermoso; el guerrero más aguerrido, el hombre más generoso, el defensor más noble; el general de la Fianna. Historias sobre cómo había sido emboscado y logrado escapar; sobre cómo, aun siendo generoso, había logrado escapar; sobre cómo había estado enardecido y marchó con la velocidad de un águila y la furia de una tormenta; mientras que hacia al frente y los alrededores, desde la delantera de su tremendo avance, habían multitudes que huían; no se atrevían a esperar ya que sabían que no les quedaba tiempo de sobra. Y sobre como cuando finalmente le llegó la hora de ser derrotado, se necesitó nada menos que el poder de toda Irlanda para lograr ese triunfo de gran magnitud.

Podemos estar seguros de que Fionn acompañaba a su padre en estas aventuras, siguiendo de cerca a ese héroe de paso firme y brindándole apoyo apasionadamente.

#### IV

Recibió un buen entrenamiento por parte de las mujeres; le enseñaron a correr, saltar y nadar.

Una de ellas tomaba una espina de planta con la mano, Fionn tomaba una con la suya y ambos tratarían de punzar al otro mientras corrían alrededor de un árbol.

Hay que correr rápido para mantenerse alejado del que te persigue con la espina y para un niño pequeño, una pinchada no se siente bien. Fionn corría lo más rápido que podía para mantenerse alejado de esa espina punzante, ¡pero como corría cuando era su turno de dar las pinchadas!

Y lo hacía con razón, pues sus nodrizas de pronto se habían vuelto implacables. Lo perseguían con un salvajismo que era indistinguible al odio y lo pinchaban siempre que se les presentaba la oportunidad.

Fionn aprendió a correr; poco después se desplazaba alrededor de los árboles como una mosca enloquecida, ¡y qué alegría que sentía cuando tomaba la espina y sorprendía por la espalda a una de ellas! Se extenuaba y agotaba persiguiéndolas para poner su espina en uso.

Aprendió a saltar persiguiendo liebres en las colinas del campo; cuando la liebre iba hacia arriba, Fionn también lo hacía y así empezaba la carrera, con ambos brincando y saltando por el campo. Si la liebre cambiaba su dirección mientras Fionn la perseguía, Fionn también lo hacía y poco después no le importaría hacia donde salte la liebre ya que él podía saltar hacia esa dirección también; hacia al frente, hacia los lados o hacia cualquier otra dirección, Fionn saltaba hacia donde la liebre saltaba hasta que logro ser el dueño de un brinco por el cual cualquier liebre habría dado una oreja.

Se le enseñó a nadar y es probable que se le haya puesto la piel de gallina en la primera lección. El agua estaba fría y profunda, se podía ver el fondo hacia abajo, millones de millas hacia abajo. Cualquier niño pequeño temblaría mientras mira hacia ese vacío infinito lleno de guijarros y criaturas escalofriantes, y aun así, ¡estas mujeres implacables lo arrojaron ahí!

Quizás no habría querido meterse al principio. Quizás les habría sonreído, intentado distraerlas y se habría alejado. Pues no les quedo opción que tomarlo de una pierna y un brazo, darle una mecida y al agua; golpeaba y salpicaba, se hundía hasta lo más profundo y chapoteaba desesperadamente hasta la superficie con lágrimas en sus ojos, habiendo intentado agarrar algo que no estaba ahí, visiblemente agitado, con una intensa desesperación, respirando pesadamente mientras era sumergido una vez más; nuevamente descendía hasta las profundidades y con esa misma prontitud se daba cuenta que lo habían vuelto a subir a tierra.

Fionn aprendió a nadar hasta que pudo inmergerse en el agua como una nutria y desplazarse entre esta como una anguila.

Había intentado perseguir peces de la misma manera en que perseguía liebres en las colinas del campo- pero los peces son criaturas muy distintas. Puede ser que un pez no pueda brincar, pero pueden aparecer en un lugar, y un segundo después aparecer en otro. Arriba o abajo, hacia los lados y alrededor, es todo lo mismo para el pez; va y viene, gira hacia un lado y desaparece en el lado opuesto. Esta encima tuyo cuando debería estar abajo y te muerde el dedo del pie cuando pensabas que le estabas agarrando la cola.

No se puede atrapar un pez nadando, pero se puede intentar, y Fionn lo intentaba. Recibió un elogio mezquino de parte de las mujeres terribles cuando fue capaz de inmergerse en la corriente, nadar por debajo del agua hacia donde flotaba un pato salvaje y agarrarlo de la pata.



“Qu-,” dijo el pato, y desapareció antes del pato pueda decir “-ack”.

El tiempo paso y Fionn fue creciendo hasta volverse largo, recto y fuerte como un roble, ágil como un felino y con la ligereza y viveza de un pájaro joven. Una de las mujeres podría haber dicho, “Está creciendo muy bien querida,” y la otra haber respondido, con el hosco humor de una tía, “Nunca será como su padre”, pero sus corazones seguramente se inflaban en la noche, en el silencio, en la oscuridad, cuando pensaban en esa ligereza viviente que habían formado y en esa adorada cabeza rubia.

## V

Un día, sus protectoras se encontraban agitadas: tenían reuniones secretas a las cuales Fionn no tenía permitido asistir. Un hombre que estaba de paso había hablado con ellas en la mañana; lo alimentaron y mientras este comía, Fionn fue espantado por la puerta como si fuera una gallina. Cuando el extraño se marchó las mujeres lo acompañaron una corta distancia por el camino y mientras pasaban por la casa el hombre levanto una mano y doblo una rodilla ante Fionn.

“Mi alma le pertenece, joven maestro,” le dijo, y mientras lo decía, Fionn supo que podía haber tenido su alma, sus botas, sus pies o lo que sea que le perteneciera a ese hombre.

Las mujeres regresaron con una actitud misteriosa y susurrante. Persiguieron a Fionn hasta la casa, y cuando entro, lo persiguieron fuera de esta una vez más. Se persiguieron entre ellas mismas alrededor de la casa para susurrarse nuevamente. Calculaban todo de distintas formas; por la forma de las nubes, la longitud de las sombras, el vuelo de las aves, viendo que mosca volaba primero hacia una piedra plana, tirando huesos sobre sus hombros izquierdos y mediante cualquier tipo de juego de azar o truco que se les ocurriera.

Le dijeron a Fionn que debía dormir en un árbol esa noche y le ordenaron que no cante, silbe, tosa o estornude hasta el amanecer.

Pero Fionn no pudo contener el estornudo; nunca había estornudado tanto en su vida. Se sentó para estornudar en el árbol y por poco se cae de un estornudo. Se le metieron moscas en la nariz, dos al mismo tiempo, una en cada fosa, y casi se le sale la cabeza de tanto estornudar.

“Estas haciendo eso a propósito,” dijo un susurro repentino desde el pie del árbol.

Pero Fionn no lo hacía a propósito. Se cubrió con una sábana plegada, como se le había enseñado y paso la noche más incómoda y desagradable de toda su vida. Después de un rato ya no sentía ganas de estornudar; sentía ganas de gritar, pero más que nada, quería bajarse del árbol. Aun así, no grito, y tampoco se bajó del árbol; cumplió con su palabra y se quedó en el árbol, tan silencioso y vigilante como un ratón, hasta que se cayó de este.

En la mañana, una banda de poetas ambulantes estaba de paso y las mujeres dejaron que Fionn se vaya con ellos. Esta vez no pudieron evitar que Fionn escuche lo que se decía.

“¡Son los hijos de Morna!” dijeron.

Al oír esto, el corazón de Fionn se podría haber llenado de furia, pero ya se le había inflado con una sensación de aventura; el momento esperado había llegado. Detrás de cada hora de sus días y de cada momento de sus vidas se encontraban los hijos de Morna. Fionn los había perseguido como a venados, había saltado tras ellos como a conejos, había nadado tras ellos como a peces. Vivían en la casa junto a él; se sentaban con él en la mesa y se comían su carne. Soñaba con ellos, y ahora iban a venir en la mañana a la salida del sol. Ellos sabían muy bien que el hijo de Uail vivía y sabían que sus propias hijos no conocerían la paz mientras ese hijo viva, pues en esos tiempos creían que de tal palo tal astilla y que el hijo de Uail sería una versión superior del mismo Uail.

Sus protectoras sabían que su lugar de escondite sería descubierto eventualmente y, cuando eso ocurriera, los hijos de Morna vendrían; no tenían duda de eso y cada acción de sus vidas estaba basada en esa certeza, pues ningún secreto se puede mantener secreto por siempre. Algún soldado herido marchando pesadamente hacia su pueblo se enteraría; un pastor buscando su rebaño perdido o una banda de músicos ambulantes oirían el rumor. ¡Cuánta gente pasaba al año incluso por el bosque más remoto! Los

cuervos revelaran un secreto si nadie más lo hace y debajo de un arbusto, detrás de los matorrales, ¡cómo saber quién está observando! Es aún más difícil conservar un secreto que tiene patas de cabrito y boca de lobo; se puede esconder a un bebe, pero no a un niño; correrá a menos que se lo amarre a un palo, pero eso no impedirá que aullé.

Los hijos de Morna llegaron, pero fueron recibidos tan solo por dos discretas mujeres en una choza solitaria. Se puede estar seguro de que fueron bien recibidos. Uno se puede imaginar la alegre mirada de Goll observando detenidamente todo lo que había alrededor.; el ojo cruel de Conan examinando los rostros de las mujeres mientras que las hostigaba con su lengua; el Cruel Mac Morna recorriendo pesadamente la casa y sus alrededores, posiblemente con hacha en mano, y Art Og adentrándose en lo profundo del campo y jurando que si el muchacho estaba ahí, lo encontraría.

## VI

Pero Fionn ya se había ido. Estaba lejos, en camino hacia las montañas Galtees con su banda de poetas.

Es probable que hayan sido poetas aprendices que habían terminado un año de estudios y hayan estado de regreso a su localidad para ver nuevamente a sus familiares en sus casas e impresionarlos y maravillarlos mientras demostraban partes de los saberes que habían adquirido en las escuelas de prestigio. Habrían tenido conocimientos sobre técnicas de rima y trucos para el aprendizaje de los cuales Fionn escucharía; y de vez en cuando, mientras descansaban en un calvero o a la orilla de un río, ponían en práctica sus lecciones. Incluso podían revisar las tablas ogámicas en las que las primeras instrucciones de sus actividades y las primeras líneas de los poemas estaban talladas y es probable que, siendo estas cosas nuevas para ellos, conversarían sobre estas con un joven y, pensando que su inteligencia no estaba a la altura de la de ellos, es posible que le hayan enseñado sobre la escritura ogámica.

Sin embargo, esta banda de jóvenes bardos le causaría un interés infinito a Fionn no a causa de lo que habían aprendido, sino por las cosas que ya sabían. Todas las cosas de las que debía saber por naturaleza: la visión, el movimiento, la sensación de la multitud, el roce y la intimidad entre los hombres, el agrupamiento de las casas y como la gente se aburría de estar dentro de ellas, los movimientos de los soldados y como se veían sus heridas cuando volvían a casa; cuentos sobre nacimientos, matrimonios y muertes, la cacería junto a multitudes de hombres y perros; todos los ruidos, la suciedad, la emoción de estar vivo. Todo esto, para alguien como Fionn que estaba recién salido de las hojas, las sombras y todas las sencilleces de un bosque, podría haber parecido maravilloso; y las historias que le habrían contado sobre sus maestros, sus apariencias, manías, severidades, tonterías, también lo habrían maravillado.

En esa banda debieron haber parloteado como pericos.

Estos poetas debieron haber sido jóvenes, pues una vez se les acercó un hombre de Leinster, un temible ladrón llamado Fiacuil mac Cona, y los asesinó. Los cortó en mil pedazos y no quedó ni una pizca de poeta. Les quitó la vida y los desapareció de este mundo; hizo que dejaran de existir a tal punto que nadie pudo saber a dónde se habían ido o que les había pasado. Es de cuestionarse como es posible que un solo hombre le haya hecho eso a nada menos que una banda; si no habrían sido jóvenes, el intrépido Fiacuil no podría haber asesinado a todos. Quizás el también tenía una banda, pero los registros dicen lo contrario; lo que es seguro es que los mató y fue así como murieron.

Fionn presenció este acto y su sangre podría haberse congelado mientras veía al temible ladrón arrasando con los poetas como lobo en rebaño. Cuando estaban todos muertos, le tocaba el turno a Fionn y si bien podría haber temblado mientras el siniestro hombre de mano roja marchaba hacia él, se llenó de coraje y derribó al monstruo con sus propios brazos; es probable que haya hecho eso, y es probable que se le haya perdonado la vida por eso.

“¿Quién eres?” rugió esa boca oscura con una lengua roja que se retorció como pez aleteante.

“El hijo de Uail y Baiscne,” expresó con firmeza. Luego de eso, el ladrón dejó de ser ladrón, el asesino desapareció, el abismo oscuro de su boca junto al pez rojo que tenía por lengua se transformaron en otra cosa, así como sus ojos redondos que parecían salirse de sus cavidades para morder a alguien. Solamente quedó un sirviente fiel y risueño que habría sido capaz de atarse a sí mismo en nudos si el hijo de su gran capitán así lo habría deseado. Fionn fue casa en los hombros del ladrón, mientras que este producía bufidos y realizaba grandes saltos, tal como un caballo de raza, pues este mismo Fiacuil era el esposo de Bovmall, la tía de Fionn. Había partido hacia las tierras silvestres en donde el clan Baiscne había sido vencido y estaba en guerra contra un mundo que se había atrevido a matar a su Capitán.

## VII

Una nueva vida le esperaba a Fionn en la guarida del ladrón, la cual estaba escondida en un frío y vasto pantano.

Era un lugar intrincado, con salidas repentinas y entradas aún más repentinas y con lugares húmedos, ventosos y estrechos en los cuales se podía acumular tesoros o esconderse de los demás.

El ladrón debió haber sido un hombre solitario, pues a falta de otra persona, hablaba extensamente con Fionn. Le habría de haber mostrado sus armas y enseñado a usarlas; con que cuchilla se debía cercenar a una víctima y con cual se la debía picar en pedazos, le explicaría porque ciertos hombres debían de ser rebanados y porque a otros bastaba con acuchillarlos. Todos los hombres son maestros cuando uno es joven y Fionn fue capaz de obtener conocimiento incluso en este lugar. Debió haber visto la gran lanza de Fiacuil la cual tenía treinta remaches de oro árabe en su borde y se debía mantener envuelta y atada para que no mate a nadie por malicia pura; esta había llegado de Faery, elaborada en la tribu de Aillen man Midna, y fue él mismo quien la traería sobre sus hombros de regreso a ese lugar.

Cuantas historias le pudo haber contado ese hombre a un niño, y cuantas preguntas el niño pudo haber tenido para él. Debió haber sabido más de mil trucos y como el hombre tiene el instinto de enseñar, en especial si se trata de un niño, se los debió haber revelado todos a Fionn.

También aprendió mucho del pantano, un lugar que le ofreció una nueva vida; una vida complicada, misteriosa, húmeda, resbalosa, incomoda, traicionera, pero con una belleza propia y un atractivo que incrementaba con el tiempo al punto en que uno se podía olvidar del mundo sólido y llegar a amar únicamente lo tembloroso y burbujeante.

En este lugar se podía nadar; “cuando veas estos carteles sabrás que es seguro nadar ahí”, le decía Fiacuil, “pero en este lugar, con este cartel, no debes meter ni un dedo del pie”.

Pero a donde sea que Fionn meta sus dedos, sus oídos lo acompañaban.

El ladrón le hizo saber que había hierbas enroscadas en las profundidades; algunas de estas eran delgadas, duras, viscosas y podían hacer tropezar y aferrarse a uno y luego de eso empujar hacia el fondo y no soltar hasta que te hayas ahogado; hasta que uno este chapoteando y manoteando hasta lo más profundo, con las extremidades extendidas y una cara llena de angustia y esfuerzo, aprisionado por esos brazos ásperos hasta a lo que se aferraban ya no se moviera.

“Ten cuidado de esto, aquello y eso,” le decía a Fionn, “y nunca olvides de nadar con un cuchillo entre los dientes.”

Vivió ahí hasta que sus nodrizas descubrieron donde estaba y lo fueron a buscar. Fiacuil se los entregó a ellas y lo llevaron nuevamente a su casa en los bosques de Slieve Bloom, ya habiendo obtenido vastos conocimientos y nuevas habilidades.

Los hijos de Morna lo dejaron en paz por un largo tiempo. Tras haberlo ido a buscar sintieron que habían cumplido con su deber y descuidaron el asunto.

“Déjenlo en paz,” se dijeron entre ellos. “El vendrá a buscarnos cuando esté listo.”

Pero también es probable que hayan tenido sus propios métodos para obtener información sobre él. ¿Cómo se entrenaba? ¿Qué músculos estaba desarrollando? ¿Podía llegar a la cima el solo con un brinco o había que ayudarlo dándole un empujón? Fionn se quedó a vivir con sus protectoras y cazaba para ellas; podía alcanzar a un



venado corriendo y traerlo del pescuezo y pataleando a la casa. “Vamos Goll,” decía mientras levantaba un ciervo sobre una mata de hierbas, sujetándolo firmemente del hocico; ¿vienes por mi Conan el calvo o acaso debo patearte en el cuello?

Se debía haber estado acercando el momento de enfrentárseles cuando empezó a pensar en tomar al mundo entero por la nariz, alzarlo sobre la mata de hierbas y arrastrarlo hacia el establo; pues era de una casta en la cual la maestría florece y de la cual provienen los mejores maestros.

Pero los informes sobre sus proezas se expandieron. El Clan Morna empezó a inquietarse ante esto y, un día, sus nodrizas decidieron que había llegado la hora de que inicie su viaje.

“Sera mejor que te vayas ahora,” le dijeron al alto joven, “pues los hijos de Morna nuevamente te están buscando para matarte.”

En esos tiempos el bosque debió haber parecido embrujado. Una piedra podía serle arrojada a uno desde la copa de un árbol, pero, ¿desde cuál de los miles de árboles que había alrededor? Una flecha podía pasar cerca del oído, deslizarse por el piso y estremecerse ahí silenciosamente, amenazante, advirtiendo sobre los parientes que pueda tener en el carcaj del que salió; ¿por dónde vino? ¿Por la derecha? ¿Por la izquierda? ¿Cuántas flechas quedaban? ¿Cuántos arqueros habían...? Fionn era un hombre del bosque, pero solamente tenía dos ojos para ver y un par de pies para llevarlo en una sola dirección y cuando este mirando hacia el frente, ¿qué o quienes lo podían estar observando por detrás? Podía haber fijado la mirada hacia una dirección; hacia o lejos de una sonrisa en un rostro escondido y un dedo tensando el arco. Una lanza le podía ser arrojada desde este arbusto o desde el de allá. En la noche se les podría haber enfrentado; sus oídos contra el de ellos, sus pasos silenciosos contra los pasos acechantes de ellos, su conocimiento del bosque contra la legión de ellos: pero durante el día no tenía ninguna posibilidad de hacerlo.

Fionn fue en búsqueda de la fortuna, a hacerle frente a lo que se le venga y a hacerse un nombre que dure hasta que el Tiempo exista y reconozca a un irlandés.

## VIII

Fionn partió y ahora se había quedado solo, pero la soledad le resultaba tan apropiada para él como para la grulla que deambula por las orillas de los mares solitarios y desolados; pues el pensamiento siempre será acompañante para el hombre y la mente de Fionn estaba en tan buen estado como su cuerpo. Para él, estar solo no era un problema, ya que aun estando rodeado de gente, permanecería solo por el resto de su vida, pues esto se dirá de él cuándo le llegue su hora: todo lo que venía a él, se iba, y la felicidad nunca lo acompañó, a excepción de ciertos momentos.

Pero en este momento no buscaba la soledad; buscaba la compañía de una multitud, por lo que cada vez que veía un grupo de personas, se les acercaba. Sus ojos tenían la habilidad de observar lo que se movía entre la penumbra y las tinieblas del bosque, habían sido entrenados para diferenciar entre pájaros color pardo y sus sombras del mismo color y entre árboles y animales del color de la corteza de un árbol. Podía ver a la liebre escondida entre las frondas y al pez que se desplazaba invisiblemente entre las algas verdes; podía ver todo lo que se podía ver, incluso las cosas que veía con uno de sus ojos, que se había quedado parcialmente ciego por el uso y el desgaste.

Al llegar al río Moy se encontró con unos muchachos nadando y, mientras los veía jugando en la corriente, pensó que los trucos que estaban realizando no le resultarían difíciles para él y que les podía enseñar trucos nuevos.

Los jóvenes tienen la necesidad de saber lo que pueden hacer otros jóvenes y están dispuestos a competir contra quien sea. Le ofrecieron lo mejor que tenían al que los estaba observando y poco después lo invitarían a competir contra ellos para que demuestre su temple. Una invitación como esa es considerada un desafío; cuando se hace entre jóvenes, es prácticamente una declaración de guerra. Pero Fionn les sacaba tanta ventaja nadando que inclusive la palabra maestro se quedaba corta para referirse a esa superioridad.

Mientras nadaba uno de los jóvenes exclamo: "Tiene el cabello rubio y buen físico," y desde entonces fue conocido como Fionn, nombre que tiene por significado "el de cabello rubio". Su nombre le fue dado por jóvenes y probablemente sean ellos mismos quienes lo preserven.

Se quedó con estos muchachos por un tiempo y, al principio, podría ser que lo idolatraban, pues es común que los jóvenes se maravillen y fascinen con las hazañas de otros, pero eventualmente ocurrió lo inevitable: se volvieron celosos del joven extraño. Los que habían sido líderes antes de él llegara se organizaron y presionaron a los demás para que se vuelvan en su contra, a tal punto que llego un momento en el cual no quedaba ni una mirada amistosa para Fionn en esa agrupación, pues no solo los superaba nadando; vencía a los mejores corriendo y saltando y cuando la competencia se tornaba violenta, lo cual era inevitable, la rudeza de Fionn seria diez veces mayor a la rudeza del rudo más rudo que le pusieran en frente. La valentía va de la mano con el orgullo cuando se es joven y Fionn era orgulloso.

Debió haber sentido ira mientras se iba, dejando atrás al lago y a los esos jóvenes gruñones y refunfuñones, pero también debió haber sentido decepción, pues en ese momento había deseado recibir amistad.

Después de eso siguió su rumbo hasta llegar al lago Leane, donde se puso al servicio del rey de Finntraigh. Ese reino tomaría su nombre del mismo Fionn y debió haber tenido otro nombre antes de que llegara ahí.

Cazaba para el rey y pronto se volvió evidente que no había otro cazador a su servicio que este a la altura de Fionn; ni siquiera había uno que se le acerque a su nivel. Los otros cazadores perseguían venados usando la velocidad de sus piernas, el olfato de sus perros y mil trucos tradicionales para poder acercárseles pero, la mayoría de veces, el animal se les escapaba. Por otro lado, los venados por los que iba Fionn no se escapaban y hasta parecía que ellos venían a él debido a la cantidad que cazaba.

El rey se maravillaba con las historias que le contaban sobre este nuevo cazador, pero los monarcas son tan curiosos como lo son superiores al resto de las gente y, al estar en nivel de excelencia, debían de ver todo lo que era excelente con sus propios ojos.

El rey deseaba ver a Fionn, quien se debió haber preguntado en que estaba pensando el agraciado monarca mientras este lo veía. Sea lo que haya estado en su mente, lo expresado por el rey fue directo tanto en declaración como en observación.

“Si Uail, hijo de Baiscne, tiene un hijo,” dijo el rey, “seguramente tu eres ese hijo.”

No se sabe si el rey de Fintraigh le dijo algo más, lo que sí se sabe es que Fionn dejó de estar a su servicio poco tiempo después.

Siguió su rumbo hacia el sur y terminó recibiendo empleo por parte del Rey de Kerry, el mismo monarca que se había casado con su madre. Estando a su servicio, llegó a tener tal consideración por parte del rey que se escuchaban historias sobre ambos jugando partidas de ajedrez, un juego para el que su mente aun joven no estaba preparada, sin importar cuan grandes estén creciendo sus extremidades. A pesar de ser muy capaz para los deportes y la cacería, aún era muy joven para estar orientado hacia la política y se mantendría apolítico por el resto de sus días, pues hacia todo lo que era capaz de hacer sin importarle quien tomara ofensa de sus actos; incluso también hacia las cosas que no era capaz de hacer. Así era Fionn.

Una vez, mientras descansaban durante una cacería, un debate sobre cuál era el sonido más hermoso del mundo surgió entre los miembros de la Fianna.

“¿Tu qué opinas?, pregunto Fionn a Oisín.

“El canto de un pájaro sobre la rama más alta de un árbol,” exclamo alegremente.

“Es un buen sonido,” dijo Fionn. ¿Y tú Oscar?” pregunto, “¿Cuál te parece el sonido más agradable?”

“El sonido de una lanza impactando un escudo es música para mis oídos,” exclamo el muchacho corpulento.

“Es un buen sonido,” dijo Fionn. El resto de los defensores expresaron cual era el sonido más placentero; el bramido de un ciervo cuando es arrojado al agua, el aullido armonioso de una manada de lobos en la distancia, el canto de una alondra, la risa de una niña alegre o el susurro de una persona amada.

“Todos son sonidos agradables,” dijo Fionn.

¿Y tú qué opinas camarada? Uno le pregunto.

“El sonido de lo que está ocurriendo,” respondió con firmeza Fionn, “ese es el sonido más hermoso del mundo.”

Amaba “lo que está ocurriendo,” y no lo evadiría por nada del mundo; y en aquella ocasión lo que estaba ocurriendo debió de haber ocurrido, a pesar de tener a un monarca como maestro y rival. Puede ser que su madre lo haya estado observando y no le haya quedado otra opción que demostrar sus habilidades ante ella: cometió el acto increíble de ganarle siete partidas consecutivas al mismísimo rey.

Es muy poco común que un súbdito pueda vencer a un rey en ajedrez y el monarca estaba debidamente asombrado.

“¿Quién eres realmente?”, exclamo, apoyándose sobre el tablero y mirando fijamente a Fionn.

“Soy el hijo de un campesino del Reino de Tara,” respondió Fionn.

Se podía haber sonrojado mientras dijo eso, pues el rey, quizás por primera vez, lo estaba mirando de verdad y estaba mirando veinte años hace atrás mientras lo hacía. La observación de un rey es impecable- es algo que ha sido comprobado en innumerables ocasiones en cuentos y este rey poseía un visión tan real como cualquier otro monarca.

“No eres hijo de ningún campesino,” respondió el monarca indignado, “tú eres el hijo que mi esposa Muirne le dio a Uall mac Baiscne.”

Fionn no tuvo nada que decir ante eso, pero sus ojos rápidamente buscaron a su madre y se fijaron en ella.

“No te puedes quedar aquí,” le dijo su padrastro. “No quiero que te maten bajo mi protección,” explicó, o quizás se quejó.

Quizás era por cuenta de Fionn que le tenía odio a los hijos de Morna, pero no se conoce lo que Fionn pensaba de él pues no volvió a hablar más de su padrastro. En cuanto a Muirne, debió haber amado a su señor; o quizás estaba realmente aterrada de los hijos de Morna y de lo que puedan hacer a su hijo, pero también puede ser que si una mujer ama a su segundo esposo, le desagrada todo lo que le recuerde del primero. Fionn retomó sus viajes.

## IX

Todos los deseos son fugaces; excepto uno, un deseo que se conserva por la eternidad. Fionn, entre tantos deseos posibles, tenía el deseo eterno, pues estaba dispuesto a ir a donde sea y abandonar lo que sea para obtener la sabiduría y fue la búsqueda de esta la cual lo llevo a la orilla del rio Boyne, el lugar donde vivía Finegas. Por el temor que le tenía al clan Morna, no emprendió ese viaje como Fionn, lo hizo con el nombre de Deimne.

Nos volvemos sabios hacienda preguntas, aun si estas no son respondidas, uno se vuelve sabio, pues una pregunta bien formulada lleva su respuesta en la espalda de la misma manera que un caracol lleva su concha. Fionn realizo todas las preguntas que se le ocurrían y su maestro, que era poeta y un hombre honorable, las respondió todas, siendo únicamente limitada por su habilidad, no por su paciencia.

“¿Porque vive en la orilla de un rio?” fue una de las preguntas. “Porque un poema es una revelación y es mediante el flujo del agua en la corriente que la poesía es revelada a la mente.”

“¿Cuánto tiempo llevas viviendo aquí?” fue su siguiente interrogante. “Siete años,” respondió el poeta.

“Bastante tiempo,” replico admirado.

“Esperaría el doble de eso por un poema,” dijo el poeta empedernido.

“¿Ha podido conseguir Buenos poemas? Fionn pregunto.

“Solo los que estoy preparado para recibir,” respondió el manso maestro. “Nadie puede conseguir más de eso, pues la preparación de un hombre es su límite.”



“¿Cree que podría haber obtenido poemas del mismo calibre en el Shannon, el Suir o en las aguas dulces del Ana?”

“Son buenos ríos,” fue su respuesta. “Todos le pertenecen a dioses benévolos.”

¿Pero porque escogió este rio de todos los otros ríos que hay?

Finegas le sonrió a su pupilo.

“Te respondería lo que sea, le dijo, “y te voy a responder eso.”

Fionn se sentó a los pies del hombre amable, sus manos acariciaban el alto pasto y lo escuchaba con total atención. “Recibí una profecía,” inicio Finegas. “Un hombre sabio predijo que yo debía atrapar al Salmon de la Sabiduría en las agua del Boyne.”

“¿Y luego de eso? Fionn pregunto ansiosamente.

“Tendría la Sabiduría Total.”

“¿Y después de eso? Insistió el muchacho.

“¿Que habría de pasar después de eso? Replico el poeta.

“Quiero decir, ¿qué haría so obtiene la Sabiduría Total?

“Es un pregunta que carga mucho peso,” respondió sonriente Finegas. “Te la podria responder si tuviera Sabiduría Total, pero por ahora no. ¿Tú qué harías con ella, querido?

“Escribiría un poema,” exclamo Fionn.

“Pienso igual,” replicó el poeta, “creo que eso es lo que se debería de hacer.”

Como pago por las enseñanzas Fionn se encargaba del cuidado de la choza de su maestro y mientras realizaba las actividades diarias; traer el agua, encender el fogón y llevar juncáceas para poner sobre el piso y las camas, él pensaba en todo lo que el poeta le había enseñado y su mente reposaba sobre las reglas de la métrica, el encanto del lenguaje y la necesidad de tener una mente limpia y audaz.

“He aprendido mucho de usted, querido maestro,” dijo agradecido Fionn.

“Todo lo que te puedas llevar de aquí te pertenece,” le dijo el poeta, “pues tienes derecho a todo lo que puedas cargar, pero no más de eso. Toma, lo que puedas, con ambas manos.

“Es posible que atrapes al salmón mientras yo este contigo,” reflexiono el joven ilusionado, ¡eso sería maravilloso!” exclamo mientras miraba con éxtasis hacia el otro lado del pasto hacia esas visiones que solo conoce la mente de un muchacho.

“Recemos por ello,” le respondió ferviente.

“Le hago otra pregunta,” continuo Fionn. “¿Cómo hace un salmón para obtener sabiduría dentro de su carne?”

“Hay un árbol color avellana que yace sobre un lugar secreto del rio. Las Nueces de la Sabiduría can de este Árbol Sagrado en el agua y, mientras estas flotan, el salmón las lleva a su boca y se las come.”

“Entonces sería aún más fácil,” propuso el joven, “si uno se dirigiera en búsqueda del Árbol Sagrado y tomara las nueces directo de él.”

“No sería tan fácil como parece,” dijo el poeta, “no sería nada fácil, pues el árbol solo puede ser encontrado con su propia sabiduría, la cual solo puede ser obtenida si se come de las nueces y estas solo pueden ser obtenidas comiendo del salmón.”

“Entonces debemos esperar por el salmón,” dijo Fionn en un intenso estado de resignación.

## X

Su vida continuó en un ciclo de tiempo sin fin en los cuales los días y las noches estaban llenos de monotonía y, sin embargo, llenos de interés. Mientras el día le llenaba su cuerpo con fortaleza, también añadía una dosis de conocimiento en su mente y cada noche unificaba ambas partes, pues es en la noche en donde resguardamos lo que hemos obtenido durante el día.

Si el tuviera que contar sobre estos días, habría contado sobre una sucesión de comidas y siestas y sobre una conversación interminable de la cual su mente se escabulliría cada vez y cuando hacia una soledad personal en donde, entre atmosferas vastas y brumosas; oscilaba, vagaba y reposaba. Luego de esto volvía a la realidad, y le resultaba placentero ponerse al tanto de su próximo pensamiento y poder recrearlo para recuperar el tiempo que había perdido; pero no podía realizar estos escapes al mundo de los sueños muy seguido, pues su maestro era demasiado experimentado como para permitir aquellas abstracciones jubilosas y anhelantes y al igual que las druidas le habían pinchado las piernas alrededor de los árboles, Finegas lo persiguió en el interior de su mente con el fin de exigirle sentido común en sus cuestionamientos y entendimiento en sus respuestas.

Hacer preguntas se puede convertir en la ocupación más vaga e inconsistente de la mente, pero cuando es uno mismo quien debe responderse el problema que te has formulado, meditaras la pregunta con cuidado y las expondrás con precisión. La mente de Fionn aprendió a desplazarse en un campo aún más inestable que en el cual él cazaba conejos y cuando había hecho su propia pregunta y le había dado su propia respuesta, Finegas se encargaría del asunto y le dejaría claro de que forma la interrogante estaba mal formulada o en qué punto la respuesta se había desorientado con el fin de que Fionn logre entender la sucesión de como una buena pregunta eventualmente se convierte en una buena respuesta.

Un día, no mucho después de la conversación antes mencionada, Finegas fue al lugar donde Fionn se encontraba. El poeta llevaba una canasta plana de mimbre bajo su brazo y en su rostro una expresión triunfante y melancólica a la vez. Estaba claramente emocionado, pero también estaba triste y mientras se encontraba de pie observando a Fionn su mirada era tan amable que hizo que el muchacho se sienta conmovido y, al mismo tiempo, era tan llena de melancolía que casi lo hace llorar. “¿Qué ocurre maestro?” dijo alarmado el joven.

El poeta colocó su canasta de mimbre sobre el césped.

“Mira dentro de la canasta hijo mío,” le dijo. Fionn miró.

“Hay un salmón.”

“Es Él Salmon,” dijo Finegas dando un gran suspiro. Fionn dio un brinco de la alegría.

“Estoy feliz por usted maestro”, exclamó. “Estoy realmente feliz por usted.”

“Yo también estoy feliz, querido mío,” el maestro replicó.

Pero, tras decir eso, bajó la frente hacia sus manos y se mantuvo silencioso y reflexivo por un largo tiempo.

“¿Que debemos hacer ahora?” Fionn exigió una respuesta, mientras observaba fijamente al pez hermoso.

Finegas se paró de donde estaba sentado, cerca de la canasta de mimbre.

“No demorare en volver,” dijo pesadamente. “Hasta mientras puedes asar el salmón para que esté listo cuando regrese.”

“Lo asare con gusto,” le dijo Fionn.

El poeta lo observo sinceramente por un buen tiempo.

“No vas a comer de mi salmón mientras no estoy?” le pregunto.

“No me comeré ni un pedacito,” respondió Fionn.

“Estoy seguro de que no lo harás,” murmuro Finegas, mientras dio la vuelta y camino lentamente entre el césped y detrás de los arbustos frondosos en la cresta.

Fionn cocino el salmón; se veía hermoso, tentador y apetitoso mientras se asaba sobre una base de madera entre plantas verdes frescas y Finegas lo vio de la misma manera cuando volvió por detrás de los arbustos alledaños y se sentó sobre el césped afuera de la puerta. Observaba al pez con más que sus ojos; lo miraba con el corazón, con su alma en la mirada y cuando le dirigió la mirada a Fionn, el muchacho no sabía si el amor en sus ojos eran para él o para el pez, lo que si sabía es que había llegado un momento muy esperado para el poeta.

“Entonces, ¿no te lo has comido después de todo?” “¿No recuerda que le prometí que no lo haría?” Fionn replico.

“Y sin embargo,” continuo el maestro, “Me fui justamente para que puedes comerte el pez si sentías la necesidad de hacerlo.”

“¿Porque habría de comer de un pez que no me pertenece?” replico con orgullo.

“Porque los jóvenes tienen deseos apasionados. Pensé que lo podrías haber probado y luego de eso te me lo habrías comido todo.”

“Si lo pude probar, por casualidad,” se rio Fionn, “pues mientras el pez se asaba le apareció una ampolla grande en su piel y no me gusto como se veía, así que la presione con mi pulgar y me lo quemé, por lo cual me lo metí en la boca para sanar la quemadura; si su salmón sabe tan bien como sabia mi pulgar, entonces le va a saber muy bien.” Dijo entre risas.

“¿Cómo dijiste que te llamabas querido mío?” Pregunto el poeta.

“Le he dicho que mi nombre es Deimne.”

“Tu nombre no es Deinme,” dijo el hombre gentil, “tu nombre es Fionn.”

“Es cierto”, replicó el muchacho, “¿pero cómo sabe eso usted?”

“Si bien aún no he comido del Salmon de la Sabiduría, tengo ciertos conocimientos propios.”

“Es bastante ingenioso saber las cosas como usted las sabe,” Fionn replicó admirado. ¿Qué más sabe sobre mi querido maestro?

“Sé que no te he dicho la verdad,” dijo el hombre apesadumbrado.

“¿Entonces qué fue lo que me ha dicho?”

“Te he dicho una mentira.”

“Eso no está bien,” Fionn reconoció. “¿Qué tipo de mentira fue, maestro? “Te dije que, según la profecía, yo debía ser quien atrape al Salmon de la Sabiduría.”

“Así es.”

“Eso ciertamente fue verdad, pues soy yo quien ha atrapado al pez; pero no te dije que no soy yo quien debe comer del salmón, a pesar de que eso también estaba establecido en la profecía y la omisión de ese detalle es donde te he mentado.”

“No es una mentira grave,” replicó consolantemente.

“Pero no debe volverse grave,” dijo firmemente el poeta.

“¿A quién le corresponde el pez?” se cuestionó su pupilo.

“Te corresponde a ti,” Finegas respondió. “Le corresponde a Fionn, el hijo de Uail y de Baiscne y le deberá ser entregado a él.”

“Usted merece la mitad del pez,” exclamó Fionn.

“Yo no voy a comer ni el pedacito más pequeño de su carne,” le dijo determinado y estremecido. “Ahora debes comer del salmón mientras que yo te observo y alabo a los dioses del Inframundo y de los Elementos.”

Fionn prosiguió a comer el Salmon de la Sabiduría y cuando este había desaparecido, una gran sensación de jovialidad, tranquilidad y exuberancia se apoderó del poeta.



“Ah,” dijo, “Tuve un combate intenso contra ese pez.”

“¿Peleo por su vida?” Fionn le pregunto.

“Lo hizo, pero esa no es la pelea a la que me refería.”

“Usted también comerá un Salmon de la Sabiduría,” Fionn le aseguro.

“Tú ya has comido de uno,” exclamo el alegre poeta, “y si me haces esa promesa significa que pasara, pues tú ya lo sabes.”

“Se lo prometo y se lo aseguro,” dijo Fionn, “usted comera un Salmon de la Sabiduria.”

## XI

Recibió todo lo que Finegas podía ofrecerle; su aprendizaje había terminado y había llegado la hora de ponerlo a prueba, así como entregar lo que le quedara en cuerpo y mente. Le dijo adiós al benévolo poeta y partió hacia la Colina de Tara.

Era tiempo de Samaín y se estaba celebrando el banquete de Tara, en donde todos los que eran sabios, talentosos o de buen nombre en Irlanda se habían reunido.

Así era Tara en sus buenas épocas. Ahí se encontraba el palacio de su Alteza el Rey con su fortificación. Al lado de este se encontraba otra fortificación que rodeaba a cuatro palacios de menor tamaño, los cuales eran conservados por uno de los cuatro reyes provinciales; al lado de este se hallaba el gran comedor y alrededor de todo se hallaban en toda su inmensidad las murallas exteriores de Tara, las cuales rodeaban la colina sagrada. Desde ahí, el centro de Irlanda, cuatro gran caminos iban hacia el norte, sur, este y oeste y a lo largo de estos, desde el tope, el fondo y los costados de Irlanda, se movilizaban semanas antes de Samain un torrente interminable de pasajeros.

Ahí estaba un grupo alegre que cargaban joyas preciosas para decorar el pabellón de un lord de Munster. En otro camino una tina de tejo añejo, tan monstruosa como una casa móvil, era empujada por una centena de laboriosos bueyes y venía moviendo y sacudiendo la cerveza que los sedientos príncipes de Connaught tomaran. Por otro camino, los sabios de Leinster, cada uno con una idea en su cabeza que podría desconcertar a un erudito del norte y dejar boquiabierto y nervioso a uno del sur, marcharan con solemnidad, cada uno en un caballo con el lomo pesadamente apilado en el lomo y los costados con sauce pelado o varas de roble, las cuales fueron talladas de principio a fin con signos ogaminos; los primeros versos de los poemas (ya que era una ofensa contra la sabiduría más que versos introductorios en la escritura), los nombres y fechas de nacimiento de los reyes, la procesión de leyes de Tara y de los virreinos, el nombre de lugares y sus significados. En el semental pardo que deambula pacíficamente en la distancia podrían ir los dioses combatientes por dos o diez mil años; esta potranca con su galope garboso y ojos crueles podría estar avanzando furtivamente

debajo de una carga de odas de roble en honor a la familia de su dueño, acompañada de unos cuantos manojos de cuentos maravillosos proporcionados en caso de ser necesarios; y quizás este équido intranquilo estaba llevando la historia de Irlanda hacia un foso.

En un viaje como ese todas las personas hablaban entre sí, ya que todos eran amigos y nadie consideraba el arma en la mano de otro hombre como algo más que un implemento para darle un pinchazo a una vaca renuente o para tranquilizar con golpes sonoros a un potro orgulloso.

Fionn cayó en un completo y profundo estado de alegre humanidad y aun si su humor habría estado tan belicoso como el de un jabalí herido no hubiera podido encontrar hombre con el cual reñir, y si sus ojos habrían estado tan penetrantes como los de un marido celoso hubiera podido encontrar a alguien que le devuelva la mirada de manera cautelosa, amenazante o temerosa; ya que Irlanda se encontraba en tiempos de paz y por seis semanas todos los hombres se trataban como vecinos y la nación tenía como invitado a su Alteza el Rey. Fionn ingreso junto a los distinguidos.

Su llegada coincidía con el día de inauguración y el gran festín de bienvenida. Quizás se maravilló al ver el esplendor de la ciudad, con sus pilares de bronce reluciente y techos pintados de varios colores, de tal manera que cada casa parecía estar cubierta por la extensión de las alas de un pájaro enorme y hermoso. Por su parte, los palacios estaban atenuados por el roble rojizo; estaban pulidos por dentro y por fuera por el desgaste y el cuidado recibido durante mil años y esculpidos con la técnica paciente de interminables generaciones de los artistas más famosos del país más artístico del occidente; estos también lo podrían maravillar. Debía parecer una ciudad salida de un sueño, una ciudad que enamora; cuando Fionn venía desde la gran llanura pudo ver a Tara sostenida de su colina como si fuera una mano que recogía todo el oro que caía del sol y que reestablecía una luminosidad tan tenue y sensible como esa largueza universal.

En el gran comedor todo estaba listo para el banquete de Tara. Los nobles de Irlanda con sus atractivas consortes, las profesiones de los artistas y los sabios representadas por el momento de su elección estaban en su lugar. El Alto Rey, Conn de las Cien Batallas, había tomado su lugar en la tarima elevada la cual estaba a la cabeza de todo ese gran salón. Hacia su derecha su hijo Art, quien luego se sería tan famoso como su padre, tomó asiento y hacia su izquierda Goll mor mac Morna, jefe de las fiannas de Irlanda, ocupaba el lugar de honor. Mientras que el Alto Rey tomaba su lugar podía observar a cada persona que era conocida por alguna razón en esas tierras. Él debía conocer a cada uno de los presentes, pues la fama de todos los hombres es sellada en Tara y detrás de su asiento se encontraba de pie un heraldo que le informaba sobre cualquier cosa que el rey no sepa o se haya olvidado.

Conn dio la señal y sus invitados procedieron a tomar asiento.

Había llegado el momento en que los escuderos tomen su lugar detrás de sus patronos y señoras; pero, por el momento, los invitados en el gran salón se encontraban sentados y las puertas se mantenían abiertas para dejar que pase un momento de respeto antes de que los sirvientes y los escuderos puedan ingresar.

De entre sus invitados, Conn pudo observar a un joven que se mantuvo de pie.

“Aquí hay un caballero” murmuró, “al cual no se le ha ofrecido asiento.”

Podemos estar seguros de que el Maestro de Ceremonias se sonrojó al oír eso.

“Y además,” continuó el Rey, “creo no conocer al joven.”

Tampoco lo conocía el heraldo, ni el desgraciado Maestro, ni nadie; pues los ojos de todos los presentes ahora se movían junto a los del Rey.”

“Dame mi cuerno,” dijo el clemente monarca.

El cuerno del estado fue colocado en su mano.

“Joven caballero,” le dijo al desconocido, “Ofrezco un brindis por tu salud y para darte la bienvenida a Tara.”

Entonces, el joven pasó al frente; era más corpulento que cualquier otro hombre fuerte que se encontraba en esa reunión, mas alto y mejor proporcionado y sus rizos rubios revoloteaban en su rostro lampiño. El Rey colocó el gran cuerno en su mano.

“Dime tu nombre,” le ordenó gentilmente.

“Soy Fionn, hijo de Uail y Baiscne,” dijo el muchacho.

Al decir eso, un toque de electricidad se sintió en el ambiente e hizo estremecer a los presentes, mientras que el hijo del gran capitán asesinado miro por sobre el hombro del Rey directo hacia el ojo titilante de Goll. Sin embargo, no se oyó ni una palabra y no se hizo ningún movimiento, a excepción del movimiento y la palabra del Alto Rey.

“Eres el hijo de un amigo,” dijo el monarca de buen corazón, “Se te dará un asiento digno de un amigo.”

Hizo que Fionn se siente a la derecha de su hijo Art.

## XII

Es sabido que en la noche del Festín de Samain se abren las puertas que separan a este mundo del siguiente y los habitantes de estos son libres de abandonar su orbe respectivo y aparecer en el mundo de los otros seres.

Ahora Dagda Mor, el Señor del Inframundo, tenía un nieto llamado Aillen mac Midna, de Shi' Finnachy, y este tal Aillen llevaba consigo una hostilidad implacable contra Tara y el Alto Rey.

Además de ser el monarca de Irlanda, Su Alteza era jefe de los magos sabios, y es posible que en algún momento Conn se haya aventurado hacia Tír na nÓg, Tierra de la Juventud, y haya cometido un acto o crimen en contra del reinado o la familia de Aillen. Debe haber sido un acto realmente execrable, ya que cada año Aillen venía lleno de furia en busca de venganza en el momento justo para destrozarse a Tara.

Había venido en nueve ocasiones en su misión de venganza, pero no era de esperarse que realmente pudiera destruir la ciudad sagrada: el Alto Rey y los magos podrían prevenir eso, pero aun así podría causar un daño tan grande que valía la pena que Conn tome las precauciones debidas contra él, incluyendo la precaución del azar.

Por consiguiente, cuando el festín concluyó y el banquete inicio, el de las Cien Batallas se levantó de su trono y miro hacia la concurrencia.

La Campana del Silencio fue agitada por el encargado cuyo deber y honor era el manejo de la Campana de Plata y con su delicado repique la tensión se convirtió en silencio, seguido por una sensación de desear saber qué encargo le haría el Rey a su gente.

“Héroes y amigos”, dijo Conn, “Aillen, hijo de Midna, vendrá hoy desde lo más alto de las montañas y traerá consigo una furia terrible y oscura en contra de nuestra ciudad. ¿Hay alguien de entre ustedes que ame a Tara y a su rey que esté dispuesto a defendernos de ese individuo?”

Hablo en silencio y cuando termino de hablar escucho ese mismo silencio, pero este se había tornado profundo, siniestro, agonizante. Cada uno de los hombres presentes miraba incómodamente al que estaba a su lado y luego dirigieron la mirada hacia su copa de vino o sus dedos. Los corazones de los jóvenes se encendieron por un momento de gallardía pero se enfriaron en el siguiente, ya que todos ellos habían escuchado sobre Aillen de Shi Finnachy en el norte. Los caballeros de menor jerarquía miraban por debajo de sus cejas a los grandes defensores, los cuales miraban con atención al más grande de todos. Art og mac Morna, el de los golpes duros, terminó mordiéndose los dedos, Conan el Jurador y Garra mac Morna refunfuñaron irritablemente el uno al otro y a los que tenían al lado, incluso Caelte, el hijo de Ronan, miraba hacia su regazo, mientras que Goll Mor sorbía tragos de vino sin parpadear los ojos. Una horrible sensación de vergüenza se tomó el gran salón y mientras el Alto Rey se ponía de pie ante ese silencio palpitante, la expresión en su rostro noble cambio de bondadosa a afligida y luego tomó un aire autoritario terrible. En otro momento, ante la eterna vergüenza de los presentes, habría sentido la obligación de aceptar su propio desafío y declararse a sí mismo como defensor de Tara por esa noche, pero la vergüenza en las caras de su gente permanecería en el corazón de su rey. La alegre forma de pensar de Goll lo ayudaría a olvidar, pero aun así su corazón se retorcería por un recuerdo que no se atrevería a encarar. Fue en ese terrible momento que Fionn se puso de pie.

“¿Que se le dará al hombre que se encargue de esta defensa? Dijo él.

“Todo lo que desee le será entregado de manera real,” fue la respuesta del rey.

“¿Quiénes son los fiadores? Dijo Fionn.

“Los reyes de Irlanda y la Mano Roja con sus magos.”

“Yo emprenderé la defensa,” dijo Fionn. Al oír eso, los reyes y magos presentes se comprometieron al cumplimiento de ese convenio.

Fionn marchó fuera del gran comedor y, mientras pasaba, todos los nobles, criados y sirvientes lo aclamaban y le deseaban buena suerte. Pero en sus corazones le estaban diciendo adiós, pues todos estaban seguros de que el muchacho estaba marchando hacia una muerte tan certera que prácticamente podía ser considerado como un hombre muerto.

Es probable que Fionn haya buscado ayuda entre la gente de Shi, pues, si bien su madre pertenecía a la tribu de los dioses, por el lado de su padre, sangre de mortal corría por sus venas. También puede ser que ya tenía conocimiento de cómo los eventos iban a transcurrir, pues había consumido el Salmón de la Sabiduría. Sin embargo, no fue registrado que en esta ocasión haya hecho uso de la magia, como lo había hecho en otras aventuras.

La forma en que Fionn descubría que estaba ocurriendo o escondido siempre era la misma que ya ha sido referenciada muchas veces. Se le traía un plato llano y oblongo hecho de oro puro, el cual era llenado con agua limpia. Fionn procedía a inclinar la cabeza y mirar fijamente hacia el agua y mientras lo hacía, llevaba su pulgar hacia su boca y lo colocaba bajo su “Diente de la sabiduría”.

El saber, debe decirse, es más valioso que la magia y más anhelado. Es muy posible ver lo que está transcurriendo y aun así no saber que nos espera, pues si bien ver es creer, tanto ver como creer no necesariamente llevan al saber. En muchos casos uno



puede ver algo o creer en algo y saber tanto de aquello como el que no hace ninguna de las dos. Pero Fionn podía tanto ver cómo saber, pues él siempre fue conocido como el Hombre Sabio y luego incluso habría dos magos en su vivienda llamados Dirim y McReith que se encargarían del trabajo pesado del saber en nombre de su ocupado maestro.

Sin embargo, la ayuda para Fionn no llegaría desde Shi.

### XIII

Marcho entre las fortificaciones contiguas hasta llegar a la gran muralla exterior en el límite de la ciudad y luego de pasarla estaría en las llanuras de Tara.

Nadie más se encontraba fuera de la ciudad aparte de él, pues en la noche del Festín de Samain nadie, a excepción de un loco, abandonaría el refugio su hogar, aunque este se estuviera incendiando; pues cualquier desastre que uno pueda sufrir dentro de una casa no es nada comparado a las atrocidades que ocurrirían fuera de esta.

El ruido del banquete se había vuelto imperceptible para Fionn, sin embargo, es posible que un silencio avergonzado se haya apoderado del gran salón y que las luces de la ciudad hayan sido bloqueadas por las grandes murallas contiguas. Tenía al cielo sobre él y a la tierra debajo y no había nada más aparte de eso, solo el viento y oscuridad.

Pero la oscuridad no era algo que le provocara miedo; habiendo sido criado por la noche del bosque y educado en su penumbra. El viento tampoco podía inquietar su oído o su corazón, pues su música no producía ninguna nota con la cual no haya meditado y lo haya transformado; la transformación era mágica. Ese quejido prolongado; ese susurro emocionante; ese silbido dulce y agudo, tan suave que casi no puede ser escuchado y es percibido más por los nervios que por el oído; ese chillido, tan brusco como el grito de un demonio y tan fuerte como diez truenos; un lamento parecido al que llora con nostalgia recordando su refugio entre las ramas y la oscuridad y un llanto como el de alguien afligido por una miseria de toda una vida recordada solo de vez en cuando; pero cuando se recuerda, se recuerda con dolor. Su oído podía reconocer las sucesiones en que llegaban y en que etapas crecían y disminuían. Escuchando en la oscuridad al manojito de ruidos que producían un sonido que era capaz de desligar y asignarles un lugar y una razón a cada gradación de sonido que conformaban ese coro: por ahí se oía saltar a un conejo y por allá se escabullía una liebre; un arbusto susurraba más allá; un pájaro silbaba; esa tensión era un lobo; esa vacilación era un zorro; ese crujido de allá era una

hoja seca raspando la corteza del árbol y el rasguño que se oía al fondo lo producía la garra de un hurón.

El miedo no puede existir donde hay conocimiento y Fionn no tenía miedo.

Su mente, la cual estaba silenciosamente enfocada hacia todas las direcciones, logro captar un sonido y se concentró en este. “Es un hombre,” dijo Fionn mientras escuchaba el sonido que provenía desde la ciudad.

En efecto, era un hombre, uno tan habilidoso en la oscuridad como el mismo Fionn. “No es un enemigo,” pensó Fionn, “está caminando abiertamente.”

“¿Quién está ahí?” Pregunto.

“Un amigo,” dijo el desconocido.

“Entonces debes tener el nombre de un amigo,” dijo Fionn.

“Sí. Es Fiacuil mac Cona,” fue su respuesta.

“¡Mi corazón va a estallar de la alegría!” exclamo Fionn, mientras daba pasos largos para encontrarse con el gran ladrón que lo recibió en el pantano.

“Así que no tienes miedo,” le dijo alegremente.

“En realidad si lo estoy,” le susurro Fiacuil, “y ni bien termine cumpla mi compromiso contigo daré la vuelta y me volveré por donde vine lo más rápido que me lo permitan mis

piernas. Que los dioses me protejan en mi retorno así como me protegieron en mi llegada.”

“Amen,” dijo Fionn, “y ahora dime, ¿a qué has venido?”

¿Tienes un plan para enfrentarte a este lord de Shi? Susurro Fiacuil.

“Lo ire a atacar,” dijo Fionn.

“Eso no es un plan,” se quejó el ladrón, “no debemos planear un ataque contra él, sino una victoria.”

“¿Acaso es un individuo atroz?” Fionn pregunto.

“Sin duda alguna. Nadie puede acercársele ni alejársele; viene desde su tribu tocando una música suave y dulce en un timpan y una flauta y todos los que escuchen esa música se quedaran dormidos.”

“Yo no me quedare dormido.”

“Si lo harás; todos lo hacen.”

“¿Que pasa después?” Fionn pregunto.

“Cuando todos estén dormidos, Aillen mac Midna empieza a escupir fuego por la boca y todo lo que es tocado ese fuego es destruido y es capaz de escupir su fuego desde distancias increíbles y hacia cualquier dirección.”

“Eres muy valiente por venir a ayudarme,” Fionn murmuro.

“Te puedo ayudar,” replicó Fiacuil, “pero debo ser recompensado.”

“¿Que tienes en mente?”

“La tercera parte de tu pago y un puesto en tu comité.”

“Te lo concedo,” dijo Fionn, “ahora, ¿cuál es tu plan?”

“¿Recuerdas mi lanza con los treinta remaches de oro árabe en el borde?”

“¿Te refieres a la que habías dejado en un balde de agua, con su puya envuelta con una sábana y encadenada a la pared; la letal Birgha? ¿Esa lanza? Fionn pregunto.

“Esa lanza le pertenece a Aillen mac Midna,” continuo, “y fue tu padre quien se la llevo de su tribu.”

“Prosigue” dijo Fionn, mientras se preguntaba en donde Fiacuil había conseguido la lanza, mas no tuvo el atrevimiento de preguntárselo.

“Cuando oigas al gran hombre de Shi venir, toma la sabana que cubre la puya de la lanza y envuelve tu cabeza con ella; pues contiene el calor, el olor, y todas los demás cualidades perniciosas y nocivas de la misma lanza y estas evitaran que caigas dormido.”

“¿Estás seguro de eso? Pregunto Fionn.

“No hay forma de quedarse dormido teniendo de cerca ese hedor; es imposible,” Replico decididamente.

Fiacuil continuo: "Aillen mac Midna bajara la guardia cuando deje de tocar su música y empiece a escupir su fuego; pensara que ya todos están dormidos, en ese momento puedes realizar el ataque que habías mencionado y esperar que la suerte te acompañe."

"Le voy a devolver su lanza," dijo Fionn.

"Aquí esta," dijo Fiacuil, quitándole la cobertura a Birgha. "Pero úsala con cuidado; témele tanto como le temes al hombre de Shi."

"No le tendré miedo a nada," dijo Fionn, "pero si sentiré lastima por ese Aillen mac Midna, a quien le devolveré su lanza."

"Me voy a marchar ahora," susurro su compañero, "pues se está haciendo más oscuro que la oscuridad más intensa que uno se puede imaginar y hay una terrible sensación que viene de lo lejos, la cual no me agrada. El hombre de Shi puede llegar en cualquier momento y si llego a escuchar una nota de su música no podre ser de más ayuda."

El ladrón se marchó y Fionn estaba solo nuevamente.

## XIV

Fionn escucho sus pasos mientras se retiraba hasta que ya no se pudieron escuchar y el único sonido que apodero de sus oídos inquietos fue el del latido de su propio corazón.

Incluso el viento se había detenido y parecía que no quedaba nada en el mundo excepto él y la oscuridad. En esa inmensa oscuridad, en esa quietud vacía e invisible, la mente podía perderse y dejar de pertenecerle a uno; podía verse abrumada y desvanecida en el espacio, al punto en que la consciencia sea transferida o disipada y uno termine dormido de pie, pues la mente le teme a la soledad más que nada y es capaz de huir hacia la luna antes de verse empujada hacia las profundidades del ser.

Pero Fionn no estaba solo y no tenía miedo cuando llegó el hijo de Midna.

Una buena parte de la noche silenciosa se había ido; el pasar de los minutos en una secuencia lenta en la cual parecía no haber tiempo ni cambios, en la cual no había pasado ni futuro, simplemente un presente tan interminable como desconcertante que prácticamente equivale a la aniquilación de la consciencia. Eventualmente llegó un cambio, pues las nubes se empezaron a mover y la luna, finalmente, pudo ser percibida a sus espaldas; no como un resplandor, sino como una filtración de luz, un destello que era bloqueado por distintas sustancias y estaba más disminuido que un simple recuerdo del mismo; algo tan minúsculo e imperceptible que podía hacer que la visión se cuestionara si realmente estaba lo estaba viendo o no e incluso pueda llevarla a pensar que la memoria está recreando algo que no está presente.

Pero Fionn tenía la visión de una criatura salvaje que observa desde la oscuridad y se mueve en ella con destreza. Por eso, fue capaz de observar, no algo, sino un movimiento en ese momento; había algo que era más oscuro que la misma oscuridad que lo rodeaba; no era un ser, era una presencia que se movía entre las sombras y poco después pudo escuchar el paso deliberado de esta gran criatura.

Fionn se hincó frente a su lanza y desató su cobertura.

De repente, surgió un sonido desde la oscuridad; un sonido suave y dulce; excitantemente alegre, excitantemente tenue; tan suave que apenas podía ser percibido por el oído, tan dulce que hacía desear a este que no pueda percibir otra cosa y lo motivaría a esforzarse para ser el único sonido, entre todos los sonidos que se pueden escuchar, que pueda escuchar; ¡era la música de otro mundo! ¡La melodía celestial de Shi! Era tan dulce que incapacitaba al oído; se introducía en este y se hacía parte de este hasta quedar adormilado y no podía volver a su estado natural hasta esa extraña armonía haya acabado; solo ahí el oído recuperaba su libertad.

Pero ya había tomado la sabana de su lanza y, al mantener su rostro cerca de esta, pudo mantener su mente y sus sentidos enfocados hacia esa puya ardiente y letal.

La música se detuvo y Aillen escupió una feroz llamarada azul de su boca y se sintió como si hubiera escupido un rayo.

En ese momento, Fionn pareció hacer uso de la magia, ya que al expandir su manto cobertor, la llama fue contenida, o más bien fue detenida, pues esta se resbaló hacia abajo a gran velocidad y atravesó veintiséis metros bajo tierra, lo cual creó una inclinación que hasta hoy es conocida como la Cañada del Manto y la elevación en donde Aillen estaba parado se conoce como la Colina de Fuego.

Uno se puede imaginar el desconcierto en Aillen mac Midna al ver su llama atrapada y extinguida por una mano invisible y también es probable que esto le haya hecho sentido temor, pues quien podría estar más aterrado que un mago que ve fallar a su magia y quien, conociendo sobre poder, es encarado con poderes de los cuales no tiene conocimiento y posiblemente le causen terror.



Había hecho como se debía hacer; había tocado su flauta y el timpan, todos los que escucharan esa música debían caer dormidos y, sin embargo, su potente llama había sido aplacada y extinguida en su totalidad.

Aillen soplo nuevamente, con toda esa gran fuerza de la cual era poseedor, y esa gran ráfaga de fuego azul que salió disparada de su boca fue nuevamente atrapada y desapareció.

El pánico se apodero del hombre de Faery; se dio vuelta de ese lugar atroz y huyó, sin saber que estaba a sus espaldas, pero teniéndole como nunca había temido a nada en su vida, lo desconocido lo acechaba; esa temible defensa se convirtió en ofensiva y se agarró de su tobillo como un lobo prendiéndose de su presa.

¡Aillen ya no estaba en su tribu! Ahora estaba en el mundo de los mortales, en donde el movimiento se dificulta y el aire se vuelve pesado. En su propio terreno, en su elemento, quizás podría haber sido más rápido que Fionn; pero este era el mundo de Fionn, estaba en su elemento y el dios volador no tuvo lo suficiente para superarlo, pero vaya que lo intento, pues fue en la entrada a su propia tribu que el perseguidor se le acercó; Fionn tomó la gran lanza por la correa y la arrojó, y esto significó el fin para Aillen mac Midna. Sus ojos se volvieron negros, su mente se agitó hasta paralizarse y un vacío se apodero de él y mientras se le adentraba por la espalda, agonizaba de dolor, cayó pesadamente y murió. Fionn separó su bella cabeza de su cuerpo y regresó hacia Tara entre la oscuridad.

Fionn marchó triunfante, pues se le había dado muerte a un dios; ¡y él fue el responsable!

Llegó al palacio al amanecer.

Esa mañana, todos se habían levantado temprano con la intención de observar la destrucción que esa temible creatura había causado, pero solamente pudieron ver al joven Fionn tomando una cabeza por su pelo como prueba indiscutible de su logro. “¿Qué es lo que deseas?” le preguntó el Alto Rey. “Lo que me corresponde,” respondió Fionn: “la capitánía de la Fianna de Irlanda.”

“Haz tu elección,” le dijo Conn a Goll Mor: “o abandonas Irlanda o le ofrecerás tu mano a este héroe y te pondrás a su servicio.”

Goll tenía la capacidad de hacer cosas que a otros les resultaría difícil y lo hacía con tanta gracia que nunca se veía denigrado ante ninguno de sus actos.

“Le ofrezco mi mano,” dijo Goll

Y miro fijamente a esos ojos firmes y jóvenes que lo estaban observando mientras se rendía ante él.



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<b>AUTOR(ES)</b>	Ycaza Vallarino, Rodrigo Alberto		
<b>REVISOR(ES)/TUTOR(ES)</b>	De Abreu Ferreira, José Antonio		
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<b>RESUMEN/ABSTRACT</b> (150-250 palabras): The following project consists of the translation into the Spanish language of the medieval Irish folktale <i>The Boyhood of Fionn</i> , as retold by author James Stephens, and a subsequent annotated translation process in which an analysis is provided in order to explain the decisions that were taken when it comes to the rendering of this particular text. This has been accomplished by using translation techniques proposed by English professor of translation Peter Newmark. The decision to work and develop this project was made for two reasons: the first one is to improve personal skills as a translator of fiction by providing the rendering to a work featuring a medieval form of English, which was challenging, as the language used in it features many unfamiliar complexities and the second one is to provide a translation into Spanish of a work that has not been officially translated into this language as of yet. The aforementioned analysis has been done by means of developing extralinguistic charts that feature extracts taken from both versions of the text and comparing them; in the case of the translated version, an explanation of what technique was used to render them into Spanish has been included as a means to provide recommendations for potential translators when having to render texts of this nature.			
<b>ADJUNTO PDF:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SI	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	
<b>CONTACTO CON AUTOR/ES:</b>	<b>Teléfono:</b> +593-4-5049619/593-9-67625381	E-mail: rodrigoycaza@gmail.com	
<b>CONTACTO CON LA INSTITUCIÓN (COORDINADOR DEL PROCESO UTE)::</b>	<b>Nombre:</b> Jarrín Hunter, Ximena Marita		
	<b>Teléfono:</b> +593-4-6043752/593-9-99614680		
	<b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:xjarrin@yahoo.com">xjarrin@yahoo.com</a> ; Ximena.jarrin@cu.ucsg.edu.ec		
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