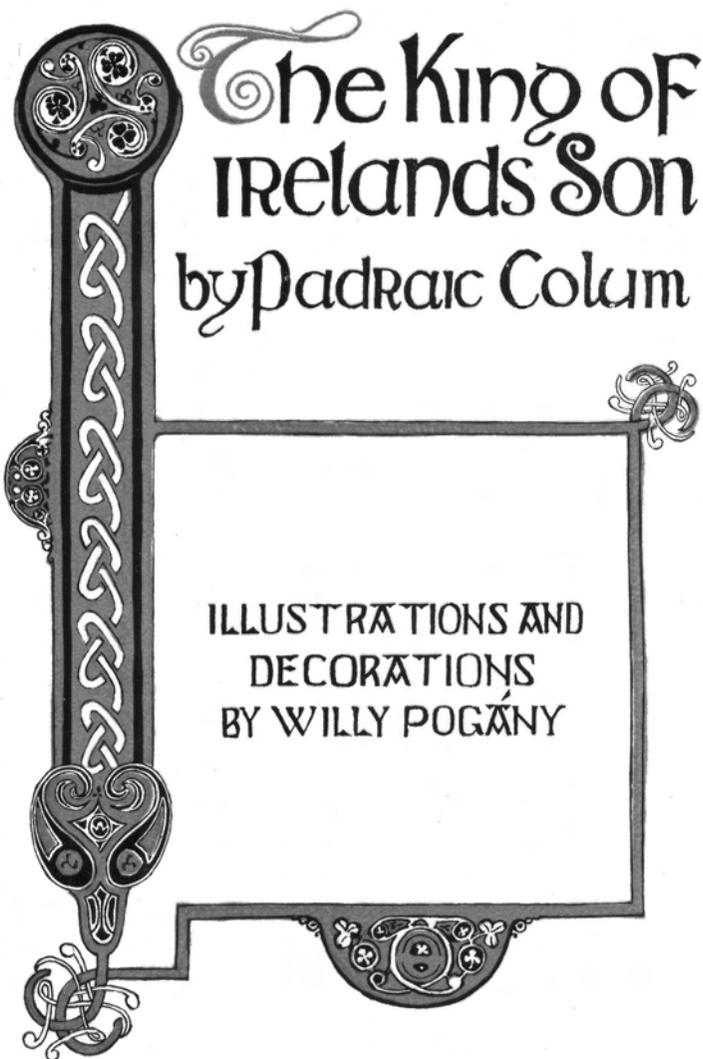


# The King of Ireland's Son



THE KING OF IRELAND'S SON SPRANG AT HIM AND THRUST THE SWORD OF LIGHT THROUGH HIS BREAST.



**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS**  
**CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA**

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TO  
MADAME LA COMTESSE DE SALLIER DU PIN  
BECAUSE OF HER INTEREST IN THESE  
STORIES OF IRELAND, AND BECAUSE  
OF HER KINDSHIP WITH THE DIS-  
COVERER OF CELTIC RO-  
MANCE, HERSART DE LA  
VILLEMARQUÉ OF  
BRITTANY



# The king of Ireland's Son





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The king of  
Ireland's Son



# Edelma

## The Enchanter's Daughter





# Fedelma, the Enchanter's Daughter

## I



CONNAL was the name of the King who ruled over Ireland at that time. He had three sons, and, as the fir-trees grow, some crooked and some straight, one of them grew up so wild that in the end the King and the King's Councillor had to let him have his own way in everything. This youth was the King's eldest son and his mother had died before she could be a guide to him.

Now after the King and the King's Councillor left him to his own way the youth I'm telling you about did nothing but ride and hunt all day. Well, one morning he rode abroad—

His hound at his heel,  
His hawk on his wrist;  
A brave steed to carry him whither he list,  
And the blue sky over him,

and he rode on until he came to a turn in the road.

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There he saw a gray old man seated on a heap of stones playing a game of cards with himself. First he had one hand winning and then he had the other. Now he would say "That's my good right," and then he would say "Play and beat that, my gallant left." The King of Ireland's Son sat on his horse to watch the strange old man, and as he watched him he sang a song to himself—

I put the fastenings on my boat  
For a year and for a day,  
And I went where the rowans grow,  
And where the moorhens lay;

And I went over the stepping-stones  
And dipped my feet in the ford,  
And came at last to the Swineherd's house,—  
The Youth without a Sword.

A swallow sang upon his porch  
"Glu-ee, glu-ee, glu-ee,"  
"The wonder of all wandering,  
The wonder of the sea;"  
A swallow soon to leave ground sang  
"Glu-ee, glu-ee, glu-ee."

"Prince," said the old fellow looking up at him, "if you can play a game as well as you can sing a song, I'd like if you would sit down beside me."

"I can play any game," said the King of Ireland's Son. He fastened his horse to the branch of a tree and sat down on the heap of stones beside the old man.

"What shall we play for?" said the gray old fellow.

*FEDELMA, THE ENCHANTER'S DAUGHTER*

“Whatever you like,” said the King of Ireland’s Son.

“If I win you must give me anything I ask, and if you win I shall give you anything you ask. Will you agree to that?”

“If it is agreeable to you it is agreeable to me,” said the King of Ireland’s Son.

They played, and the King of Ireland’s Son won the game. “Now what do you desire me to give, King’s Son?” said the gray old fellow.

“I shan’t ask you for anything,” said the King of Ireland’s Son, “for I think you haven’t much to give.”

“Never mind that,” said the gray old fellow. “I mustn’t break my promise, and so you must ask me for something.”

“Very well,” said the King’s Son. “Then there’s a field at the back of my father’s Castle and I want to see it filled with cattle to-morrow morning. Can you do that for me?”

“I can,” said the gray old fellow.

“Then I want fifty cows, each one white with a red ear, and a white calf going beside each cow.”

“The cattle shall be as you wish.”

“Well, when that’s done I shall think the wager has been paid,” said the King of Ireland’s son. He mounted his horse, smiling at the foolish old man who played cards with himself and who thought he could bring

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together fifty white kine, each with a red ear, and a white calf by the side of each cow. He rode away—

His hound at his heel,  
His hawk on his wrist;  
A brave steed to carry him whither he list,  
And the green ground under him,

and he thought no more of the gray old fellow.



UT in the morning, when he was taking his horse out of the stable, he heard the grooms talking about a strange happening. Art, the King's Steward, had gone out and had found the field at the back of the Castle filled with cattle.

There were fifty white red-eared kine there and each cow had a white calf at her side. The King had ordered Art, his Steward, to drive them away. The King of Ireland's Son watched Art and his men trying to do it. But no sooner were the strange cattle put out at one side of the field than they came back on the other. Then down came Maravaun, the King's Councillor. He declared they were enchanted cattle, and that no one on Ireland's ground could put them away. So in the seven-acre field the cattle stayed.

When the King of Ireland's Son saw what his companion of yesterday could do he rode straight to the glen to try if he could have another game with him. There at the turn of the road, on a heap of stones, the gray old fellow was sitting playing a game of cards, the right hand against the left. The King of Ireland's Son fastened his horse to the branch of a tree and dismounted.

*FEDELMA, THE ENCHANTER'S DAUGHTER*

“Did you find yesterday’s wager settled?” said the gray old fellow.

“I did,” said the King of Ireland’s Son.

“Then shall we have another game of cards on the same understanding?” said the gray old fellow.

“I agree, if you agree,” said the King of Ireland’s son. He sat under the bush beside him and they played again. The King of Ireland’s Son won.

“What would you like me to do for you this time?” said the gray old fellow.

Now the King’s Son had a step-mother, and she was often cross-tempered, and that very morning he and she had vexed each other. So he said, “Let a brown bear, holding a burning coal in his mouth, put Caintigern the Queen from her chair in the supper-room to-night.”

“It shall be done,” said the gray old fellow.

Then the King of Ireland’s Son mounted his horse and rode away—

His hound at his heel,  
His hawk on his wrist;  
A brave steed to carry him whither he list  
And the green ground under him,

and he went back to the Castle. That night a brown bear, holding a burning coal in his mouth, came into the supper-room and stood between Caintigern the Queen and the chair that belonged to her. None of the servants could drive it away, and when Maravaun, the King’s Councillor, came he said, “This is an enchanted

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creature also, and it is best for us to leave it alone." So the whole company went and left the brown bear in the supper-room seated in the Queen's chair.

### II



HE next morning when he wakened the King's Son said, "That was a wonderful thing that happened last night in the supper-room. I must go off and play a third game with the gray old fellow who sits on a heap of stones at the turn of the road." So, in the morning early he mounted and rode away—

His hound at his heel,  
His hawk on his wrist;  
A brave steed to carry him whither he list,  
And the green ground under him,

and he rode on until he came to the turn in the road. Sure enough the old gray fellow was there. "So you've come to me again, King's Son," said he. "I have," said the King of Ireland's Son, "and I'll play a last game with you on the same understanding as before." He tied his horse to the branch and sat down on the heap of stones. They played. The King of Ireland's Son lost the game. Immediately the gray old fellow threw the cards down on the stones and a wind came up and carried them away. Standing up he was terribly tall.

"King's Son," said he, "I am your father's enemy and I have done him an injury. And to the Queen who is

*FEDELMA, THE ENCHANTER'S DAUGHTER*

your father's wife I have done an injury too. You have lost the game and now you must take the penalty I put upon you. You must find out my dwelling-place and take three hairs out of my beard within a year and a day, or else lose your head."

With that he took the King of Ireland's Son by the shoulders and lifted him on his horse, turning the horse in the direction of the King's Castle. The King's Son rode on—

His hound at his heel,  
His hawk on his wrist;  
A brave steed to carry him whither he list,  
And the blue sky over him.

That evening the King noticed that his son was greatly troubled. And when he lay down to sleep everyone in the Castle heard his groans and his moans. The next day he told his father the story from beginning to end. The King sent for Maravaun his Councillor and asked him if he knew who the Enchanter was and where his son would be likely to find him.

"From what he said," said Maravaun, "we may guess who he is. He is the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands and his dwelling-place is hard to find. Nevertheless your son must seek for him and take the three hairs out of his beard or else lose his head. For if the heir to your kingdom does not honorably pay his forfeit, the ground of Ireland won't give crops and the cattle won't give milk." "And," said the Councillor, "as a year is little for his search, he should start off at once, although

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I'm bound to say, that I don't know what direction he should go in."

The next day the King's Son said good-by to his father and his foster-brothers and started off on his journey. His step-mother would not give him her blessing on account of his having brought in the brown bear that turned her from her chair in the supper-room. Nor would she let him have the good horse he always rode. Instead the Prince was given a horse that was lame in a leg and short in the tail. And neither hawk nor hound went with him this time.



All day the King's Son was going, traveling through wood and waste until the coming on of night. The little fluttering birds were going from the bush tops, from tuft to tuft, and to the briar-roots, going to rest; but if they were, he was not, till the night came on, blind and dark. Then the King's Son ate his bread and meat, put his satchel under his head and lay down to take his rest on the edge of a great waste.

In the morning he mounted his horse and rode on. And as he went across the waste he saw an extraordinary sight—everywhere were the bodies of dead creatures—a cock, a wren, a mouse, a weasel, a fox, a badger, a raven—all the birds and beasts that the King's Son had ever known. He went on, but he saw no living creature before him. And then, at the end of the waste he came upon two living creatures struggling. One was an eagle and the other was an eel. And the eel had twisted itself round the eagle, and the eagle had covered her eyes

*FEDELMA, THE ENCHANTER'S DAUGHTER*

with the black films of death. The King's Son jumped off his horse and cut the eel in two with a sharp stroke of his sword.

The eagle drew the films from her eyes and looked full at the King's Son. "I am Laheen the Eagle," she said, "and I will pay you for this service, Son of King Connal. Know that there has been a battle of the creatures—a battle to decide which of the creatures will make laws for a year. All were killed except the eel and myself, and if you had not come I would have been killed and the eel would have made the laws. I am Laheen the Eagle and always I will be your friend. And now you must tell me how I can serve you."

"You can serve me," said the King's Son, "by showing me how I may come to the dominion of the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands."

"I am the only creature who can show you, King's Son. And if I were not old now I would carry you there on my back. But I can tell you how you can get there. Ride forward for a day, first with the sun before you and then with the sun at your back, until you come to the shore of a lake. Stay there until you see three swans flying down. They are the three daughters of the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands. Mark the one who carries a green scarf in her mouth. She is the youngest daughter and the one who can help you. When the swans come to the ground they will transform themselves into maidens and bathe in the lake. Two will come out, put on their swanskins and transform themselves and fly away. But you must hide the swanskin that belongs to

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the youngest maiden. She will search and search and when she cannot find it she will cry out, 'I would do anything in the world for the creature who would find my swanskin for me.' Give the swanskin to her then, and tell her that the only thing she can do for you is to show you the way to her father's dominion. She will do that, and so you will come to the House of the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands. And now farewell to you, Son of King Connal."

Laheen the Eagle spread out her wings and flew away, and the King's Son journeyed on, first with the sun before him and then with the sun at his back, until he came to the shore of a wide lake. He turned his horse away, rested himself on the ground, and as soon as the clear day came he began to watch for the three swans.

### III



THEY came, they flew down, and when they touched the ground they transformed themselves into three maidens and went to bathe in the lake. The one who carried the green scarf left her swanskin under a bush. The King's Son took it and hid it in a hollow tree.

Two of the maidens soon came out of the water, put on their swanskins and flew away as swans. The younger maiden stayed for a while in the lake. Then she came out and began to search for her swanskin. She searched and searched, and at last the King's Son heard her say,

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“I would do anything in the world for the creature who would find my swanskin for me.” Then he came from where he was hiding and gave her the swanskin. “I am the Son of the King of Ireland,” he said, “and I want you to show me the way to your father’s dominion.”

“I would prefer to do anything else for you,” said the maiden.

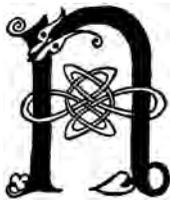
“I do not want anything else,” said the King of Ireland’s Son.

“If I show you how to get there will you be content?”

“I shall be content.”

“You must never let my father know that I showed you the way. And he must not know when you come that you are the King of Ireland’s Son.”

“I will not tell him you showed me the way and I will not let him know who I am.”



NOW that she had the swanskin she was able to transform herself. She whistled and a blue falcon came down and perched on a tree. “That falcon is my own bird,” said she. “Follow where it flies and you will come to my father’s house. And now good-bye to you. You will be in danger, but I will try to help you. Fedelma is my name.” She rose up as a swan and flew away.

The blue falcon went flying from bush to bush and from rock to rock. The night came, but in the morning the blue falcon was seen again. The King’s Son followed, and at last he saw a house before him. He went in,



THEN HE CAME FROM WHERE HE WAS  
HIDING AND GAVE HER THE SWANSKIN.

*FEDELMA, THE ENCHANTER'S DAUGHTER*

and there, seated on a chair of gold was the man who seemed so tall when he threw down the cards upon the heap of stones. The Enchanter did not recognize the King's Son without his hawk and his hound and the fine clothes he used to wear. He asked who he was and the King's Son said he was a youth who had just finished an apprenticeship to a wizard. "And," said he, "I have heard that you have three fair daughters, and I came to strive to gain one of them for a wife."

"In that case," said the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands, "you will have to do three tasks for me. If you are able to do them I will give you one of my three daughters in marriage. If you fail to do any one of them you will lose your head. Are you willing to make the trial?"

"I am willing," said the King of Ireland's Son.

"Then I shall give you your first task to-morrow. It is unlucky that you came to-day. In this country we eat a meal only once a week, and we have had our meal this morning."

"It is all the same to me," said the King's Son, "I can do without food or drink for a month without any hardship."

"I suppose you can do without sleep too?" said the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands.

"Easily," said the King of Ireland's Son.

"That is good. Come outside now, and I'll show you your bed." He took the King's Son outside and showed him a dry narrow water-tank at the gable end

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of the house. "There is where you are to sleep," said the Enchanter. "Tuck yourself into it now and be ready for your first task at the rising of the sun."

The King of Ireland's Son went into the little tank. He was uncomfortable there you may be sure. But in the middle of the night Fedelma came and brought him into a fine room where he ate and then slept until the sun was about to rise in the morning. She called him and he went outside and laid himself down in the water-tank.

As soon as the sun rose the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands came out of the house and stood beside the water-tank. "Come now," said he, "and I will show you the first task you have to perform." He took him to where a herd of goats was grazing. Away from the goats was a fawn with white feet and little bright horns. The fawn saw them, bounded into the air, and raced away to the wood as quickly as any arrow that a man ever shot from a bow.

"That is Whitefoot the Fawn," said the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands. "She grazes with my goats but none of my gillies can bring her into my goat-house. Here is your first task—run down Whitefoot the Fawn and bring her with my goats into the goat-shelter this evening." When he said that the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands went away laughing to himself.

"Good-by, my life," said the King of Ireland's Son, "I might as well try to catch an eagle on the wing as to run down the deer that has gone out of sight already."

He sat down on the ground and his despair was

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great. Then his name was called and he saw Fedelma coming towards him. She looked at him as though she were in dread, and said, "What task has my father set you?" He told her and then she smiled. "I was in dread it would be a more terrible task," she said. "This one is easy. I can help you to catch Whitefoot the Fawn. But first eat what I have brought you.



HE put down bread and meat and wine, and they sat down and he ate and drank. "I thought he might set you this task," she said, "and so I brought you something from my father's store of enchanted things. Here are the Shoes of Swiftness. With these on your feet you can run down Whitefoot the Fawn. But you must catch her before she has gone very far away. Remember that she must be brought in when the goats are going into their shelter at sunset. You will have to walk back for all the time you must keep hold of her silver horns. Hasten now. Run her down with the Shoes of Swiftness and then lay hold of her horns. Above all things Whitefoot dreads the loss of her silver horns."

He thanked Fedelma. He put on the Shoes of Swiftness and went into the wood. Now he could go as the eagle flies. He found Whitefoot the Fawn drinking at the Raven's pool.

When she saw him she went from thicket to thicket. The Shoes of Swiftness were hardly any use to him in these shut-in places. At last he beat her from the last thicket. It was the hour of noon-tide then. There was a clear plain before them and with the Shoes of Swiftness

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he ran her down. There were tears in the Fawn's eyes and he knew she was troubled with the dread of losing her silver horns.

He kept his hands on the horns and they went back over miles of plain and pasture, bog and wood. The hours were going quicker than they were going. When he came within the domain of the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands he saw the goats going quickly before him. They were hurrying from their pastures to the goat-shelter, one stopping, maybe, to bite the top of a hedge and another giving this one a blow with her horns to hurry her on. "By your silver horns, we must go faster," said the King of Ireland's Son to the Fawn. They went more quickly then.

He saw the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands waiting at the goat-house, now counting the goats that came along and now looking at the sun. When he saw the King of Ireland's Son coming with his capture he was so angry that he struck an old full-bearded goat that had stopped to rub itself. The goat reared up and struck him with his horns.

"Well," said the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands, "you have performed your first task, I see. You are a greater enchanter than I thought you were. Whitefoot the Fawn can go in with my goats. Go back now to your own sleeping-place. To-morrow I'll come to you early and give you your second task."

The King of Ireland's Son went back and into the dry water-tank. He was tired with his day's journey after

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Whitefoot the Fawn. It was his hope that Fedelma would come to him and give him shelter for that night.

IV



UNTIL the white moon rose above the trees; until the hounds went out hunting for themselves; until the foxes came down and hid in the hedges, waiting for the cocks and hens to stir out at the first light—so long did the King of Ireland's Son stay huddled in the dry water-tank.

By that time he was stiff and sore and hungry. He saw a great white owl flying towards the tank. The owl perched on the edge and stared at the King's Son. "Have you a message for me?" he asked. The owl shrugged with its wings three times. He thought that meant a message. He got out of the tank and prepared to follow the owl. It flew slowly and near the ground, so he was able to follow it along a path through the wood.

The King's Son thought the owl was bringing him to a place where Fedelma was, and that he would get food there, and shelter for the rest of the night. And sure enough the owl flew to a little house in the wood. The King's Son looked through the window and he saw a room lighted with candles and a table with plates and dishes and cups, with bread and meat and wine. And he saw at the fire a young woman spinning at a spinning wheel, and her back was towards him, and her hair was

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the same as Fedelma's. Then he lifted the latch of the door and went very joyfully into the little house.

But when the young woman at the spinning wheel turned round he saw that she was not Fedelma at all. She had a little mouth, a long and a hooked nose, and her eyes looked cross-ways at a person. The thread she was spinning she bit with her long teeth, and she said, "You are welcome here, Prince."

"And who are you?" said the King of Ireland's Son.

"Aefa is my name," said she, "I am the eldest and the wisest daughter of the Enchanter of the Black Backlands. My father is preparing a task for you," said she, "and it will be a terrible task, and there will be no one to help you with it, so you will lose your head surely. And what I would advise you to do is to escape out of this country at once."

"And how can I escape?" said the King of Ireland's Son.

"There's only one way to escape," said she, "and that is for you to take the Slight Red Steed that my father has secured under nine locks. That steed is the only creature that can bring you to your own country. I will show you how to get it and then I will ride to your home with you."

"And why should you do that?" said the King of Ireland's Son.

"Because I would marry you," said Aefa.

"But," said he, "if I live at all Fedelma is the one I will marry."

*FEDELMA, THE ENCHANTER'S DAUGHTER*

No sooner did he say the words than Aefa screamed out, "Seize him, my cat-o'-the-mountain. Seize him and hold him." Then the cat-o'-the-mountain that was under the table sprang across the room and fixed himself on his shoulder. He ran out of the house. All the time he was running the cat-o'-the-mountain was trying to tear his eyes out. He made his way through woods and thickets, and mighty glad he was when he saw the tank at the gable-end of the house. The cat-o'-the-mountain dropped from his back then. He got into the tank and waited and waited. No message came from Fedelma. He was a long time there, stiff and sore and hungry, before the sun rose and the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands came out of the house.

V

 HOPE you had a good night's rest," said the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands, when he came to where the King of Ireland's Son was crouched, just at the rising of the sun. "I had indeed," said the King's Son. "And I suppose you feel fit for another task," said the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands. "More fit than ever in my life before," said the King of Ireland's Son.

The Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands took him past the goat-house and to where there was an open shelter for his bee-hives. "I want this shelter thatched," said he, "and I want to have it thatched with the feathers of birds. Go," said he, "and get enough feathers of wild birds and come back and thatch the bee-hive shelter for

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me, and let it be done before the set of sun.” He gave the King’s Son arrows and a bow and a bag to put the feathers in, and advised him to search the moor for birds. Then he went back to the house.

The King of Ireland’s Son ran to the moor and watched for birds to fly across. At last one came. He shot at it with an arrow but did not bring it down. He hunted the moor all over but found no other bird. He hoped that he would see Fedelma before his head was taken off.

Then he heard his name called and he saw Fedelma coming towards him. She looked at him as before with dread in her eyes and asked him what task her father had set him. “A terrible task,” he said, and he told her what it was. Fedelma laughed. “I was in dread he would give you another task,” she said. “I can help you with this one. Sit down now and eat and drink from what I have brought you.”

He sat down and ate and drank and he felt hopeful seeing Fedelma beside him. When he had eaten Fedelma said, “My blue falcon will gather the birds and pull the feathers off for you. Still, unless you gather them quickly there is danger, for the roof must be thatched with feathers at the set of sun.” She whistled and her blue falcon came. He followed it across the moor. The blue falcon flew up in the air and gave a bird-call. Birds gathered and she swooped amongst them pulling feathers off their backs and out of their wings. Soon there was a heap of feathers on the ground—pigeons’ feathers and pie’s feathers, crane’s and crow’s, blackbird’s



THE KING OF IRELAND'S SON QUICKLY  
GATHERED THEM INTO HIS BAG.

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and starling's. The King of Ireland's Son quickly gathered them into his bag. The falcon flew to another place and gave her bird-call again. The birds gathered, and she went amongst them, plucking their feathers. The King's Son gathered them and the blue falcon flew to another place. Over and over again the blue falcon called to the birds and plucked out their feathers, and over and over again the King's Son gathered them into his bag. When he thought he had feathers enough to thatch the roof he ran back to the shelter. He began the thatching, binding the feathers down with little willow rods. He had just finished when the sun went down. The old Enchanter came up and when he saw what the King's Son had done he was greatly surprised. "You surely learned from the wizard you were apprenticed to," said he. "But tomorrow I will try you with another task. Go now and sleep in the place where you were last night." The King's Son, glad that the head was still on his shoulders, went and lay down in the water-tank.

## VI



UNTIL the white moon went out in the sky; until the Secret People began to whisper in the woods—so long did the King of Ireland's Son remain in the dry water-tank that night.

And then, when it was neither dark nor light, he saw a crane flying towards him. It lighted on the edge of the tank. "Have you a message for me?" said the King of Ireland's Son. The crane tapped three times

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with its beak. Then the King's Son got out of the tank and prepared to follow the bird-messenger.

This was the way the crane went. It would fly a little way and then light on the ground until the Prince came up to it. Then it would fly again. Over marshes and across little streams the crane led him. And all the time the King of Ireland's Son thought he was being brought to the place where Fedelma was—to the place where he would get food and where he could rest until just before the sun rose.

They went on and on till they came to an old tower. The crane lighted upon it. The King's Son saw there was an iron door in the tower and he pulled a chain until it opened. Then he saw a little room lighted with candles, and he saw a young woman looking at herself in the glass. Her back was towards him and her hair was the same as Fedelma's.

But when the young woman turned round he saw she was not Fedelma. She was little, and she had a face that was brown and tight like a nut. She made herself very friendly to the King of Ireland's Son and went to him and took his hands and smiled into his face.

“You are welcome here,” said she.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I am Gilveen,” said she, “the second and the most loving of the three daughters of the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands.” She stroked his face and his hands when she spoke to him.

“And why did you send for me?”

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“Because I know what great trouble you are in. My father is preparing a task for you, and it will be a terrible one. You will never be able to carry it out.”

“And what should you advise me to do, King’s daughter?”

“Let me help you. In this tower,” said she, “there are the wisest books in the world. We’ll surely find in one of them a way for you to get from this country. And then I’ll go back with you to your own land.”

“Why would you do that?” asked the King of Ireland’s Son.

“Because I wish to be your wife,” Gilveen said.

“But,” said he, “if I live at all Fedelma is the one I’ll marry.”

When he said that Gilveen drew her lips together and her chin became like a horn. Then she whistled through her teeth, and instantly everything in the room began to attack the King’s Son. The looking glass on the wall flung itself at him and hit him on the back of the head. The leg of the table gave him a terrible blow at the back of the knees. He saw the two candles hopping across the floor to burn his legs. He ran out of the room, and when he got to the door it swung around and gave him a blow that flung him away from the tower. The crane that was waiting on the tower flew down, its neck and beak outstretched, and gave him a blow on the back.

So the King of Ireland’s Son went back over the

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marshes and across the little streams, and he was glad when he saw the gable-end of the house again.

He went into the tank. He knew that he had not long to wait before the sun would rise and the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands would come to him and give him the third and the most difficult of the three tasks. And he thought that Fedelma was surely shut away from him and that she would not be able to help him that day.

VII



AT the rising of the sun the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands came to where the King of Ireland's Son was huddled and said, "I am now going to set you the third and last task. Rise up now and come with me."

The King's Son came out of the water-tank and followed the Enchanter. They went to where there was a well. The King's Son looked down and he could not see the bottom, so deep the well was. "At the bottom," said the Enchanter, "is the Ring of Youth. You must get it and bring it to me, or else you must lose your head at the setting of that sun." That was all he said. He turned then and went away.

The King's Son looked into the well and he saw no way of getting down its deep smooth sides. He walked back towards the Castle. On his way he met Fedelma, and she looked at him with deep dread in her eyes. "What task did my father set you to-day?" said she. "He

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“bids me go down into a well,” said the King’s Son. “A well!” said Fedelma, and she became all dread. “I have to take the Ring of Youth from the bottom and bring it to him,” said the King’s Son. “Oh,” said Fedelma, “he has set you the task I dreaded.”

Then she said, “You will lose your life if the Ring of Youth is not taken out of the well. And if you lose yours I shall lose my life too. There is one way to get down the sides of the well. You must kill me. Take my bones and make them as steps while you go down the sides. Then, when you have taken the Ring of Youth out of the water, put my bones as they were before, and put the Ring above my heart. I shall be alive again. But you must be careful that you leave every bone as it was.”

The King’s Son fell into a deeper dread than Fedelma when he heard what she said. “This can never be,” he cried. “It must be,” said she, “and by all your vows and promises I command that you do it. Kill me now and do as I have bidden you. If it be done I shall live. If it be not done you will lose your life and I will never regain mine.”

He killed her. He took the bones as she had bidden him, and he made steps down the sides of the well. He searched at the bottom, and he found the Ring of Youth. He brought the bones together again. Down on his knees he went, and his heart did not beat nor did his breath come or go until he had fixed them in their places. Over the heart he placed the Ring. Life came back to Fedelma.

“You have done well,” she said. “One thing only is

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not in its place—the joint of my little finger.” She held up her hand and he saw that her little finger was bent.

“I have helped you in everything,” said Fedelma, “and in the last task I could not have helped you if you had not been true to me when Aefa and Gilveen brought you to them. Now the three tasks are done, and you can ask my father for one of his daughters in marriage. When you bring him the Ring of Youth he will ask you to make a choice. I pray that the one chosen will be myself.”

“None other will I have but you, Fedelma, love of my heart,” said the King of Ireland’s Son.

VIII



HE King of Ireland’s Son went into the house before the setting of the sun. The Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands was seated on his chair of gold. “Have you brought me the Ring of Youth?” he asked.

“I have brought it,” said the King’s Son.

“Give it to me then,” said the Enchanter.

“I will not,” said the King’s Son, “until you give what you promised me at the end of my tasks—one of your three daughters for my wife.”

The Enchanter brought him to a closed door. “My three daughters are within that room,” said he. “Put your hand through the hole in the door, and the one

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whose hand you hold when I open it—it is she you will have to marry.”

Then wasn't the mind of the King's Son greatly troubled? If he held the hand of Aefa or Gilveen he would lose his love Fedelma. He stood without putting out his hand. “Put your hand through the hole of the door or go away from my house altogether,” said the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands.

The King of Ireland's Son ventured to put his hand through the hole in the door. The hands of the maidens inside were all held in a bunch. But no sooner did he touch them than he found that one had a broken finger. This he knew was Fedelma's hand, and this was the hand he held.

“You may open the door now,” said he to the Enchanter.

He opened the door and the King of Ireland's Son drew Fedelma to him. “This is the maiden I choose,” said he, “and now give her her dowry.”

“The dowry that should go with me,” said Fedelma, “is the Slight Red Steed.”

“What dowry do you want with her, young man?” said the Enchanter.

“No other dowry but the Slight Red Steed.”

“Go round to the stable then and get it. And I hope no well-trained wizard like you will come this way again.”

“No well-trained wizard am I, but the King of

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Ireland's Son. And I have found your dwelling-place within a year and a day. And now I pluck the three hairs out of your beard, Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands."

The beard of the Enchanter bristled like spikes on a hedgehog, and the balls of his eyes stuck out of his head. The King's Son plucked the three hairs of his beard before he could lift a hand or say a word. "Mount the Slight Red Steed and be off, the two of you," said the Enchanter.

The King of Ireland's Son and Fedelma mounted the Slight Red Steed and rode off, and the Enchanter of the Black Back-Lands, and his two daughters, Aefa and Gilveen, in a rage watched them ride away.

IX



HEY crossed the River of the Ox, and went over the Mountain of the Fox and were in the Glen of the Badger before the sun rose. And there, at the foot of the Hill of Horns, they found an old man gathering dew from the grass.

"Could you tell us where we might find the Little Sage of the Mountain?" Fedelma asked the old man.

"I am the Little Sage of the Mountain," said he, "and what is it you want of me?"

"To betroth us for marriage," said Fedelma.

"I will do that. Come to my house, the pair of you.

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And as you are both young and better able to walk than I am it would be fitting to let me ride on your horse.”

The King's Son and Fedelma got off and the Little Sage of the Mountain got on the Slight Red Steed. They took the path that went round the Hill of Horns. And at the other side of the hill they found a hut thatched with one great wing of a bird. The Little Sage got off the Slight Red Steed. “Now,” said he, “you're both young, and I'm an old man and it would be fitting for you to do my day's work before you call upon me to do anything for you. Now would you,” said he to the King of Ireland's Son, “take this spade in your hand and go into the garden and dig my potatoes for me? And would you,” said he to Fedelma, “sit down at the quern-stone and grind the wheat for me?”

The King of Ireland's Son went into the garden and Fedelma sat at the quern-stone that was just outside the door; he dug and she ground while the Little Sage sat at the fire looking into a big book. And when Fedelma and the King's Son were tired with their labor he gave them a drink of buttermilk.

She made cakes out of the wheat she had ground and the King's Son washed the potatoes and the Little Sage boiled them and so they made their supper. Then the Little Sage of the Mountain melted lead and made two rings; and one ring he gave to Fedelma to give to the King's Son and one he gave to the King's Son to give to Fedelma. And when the rings were given he said, “You are betrothed for your marriage now.”

They stayed with the Little Sage of the Mountain

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that night, and when the sun rose they left the house that was thatched with the great wing of a bird and they turned towards the Meadow of Brightness and the Wood of Shadows that were between them and the King of Ireland's domain. They rode on the Slight Red Steed, and the Little Sage of the Mountain went with them a part of the way. He seemed downcast and when they asked him the reason he said, "I see dividing ways and far journeys for you both." "But how can that be," said the King's Son, "when, in a little while we will win to my father's domain?" "It may be I am wrong," said the Little Sage, "and if I am not, remember that devotion brings together dividing ways and that high hearts win to the end of every journey." He bade them good-by then, and turned back to his hut that was thatched with the great wing of a bird.

They rode across the Meadow of Brightness and Fedelma's blue falcon sailed above them. "Yonder is a field of white flowers," said she, "and while we are crossing it you must tell me a story."

"I know by heart," said the King's Son, "only the stories that Maravaun, my father's Councillor, has put into the book he is composing—the book that is called 'The Breastplate of Instruction.'"

"Then," said Fedelma, "tell me a story from 'The Breastplate of Instruction,' while we are crossing this field of white flowers."

"I will tell you the first story that is in it," said the King's Son.

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Then while they were crossing the field of white flowers the King's Son told Fedelma the story of