



The Story of Manus

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Celtic

Intermediate
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Far away over the sea of the West there reigned a king who had two sons; and the name of the one was Oireal, and the name of the other was Iarlaid. When the boys were still children, their father and mother died, and a great council was held, and a man was chosen from among them who would rule the kingdom till the boys were old enough to rule it themselves.

The years passed on, and by-and-by another council was held, and it was agreed that the king's sons were now of an age to take the power which rightly belonged to them. So the youths were bidden to appear before the council, and Oireal the elder was smaller and weaker than his brother.

'I like not to leave the deer on the hill and the fish in the rivers, and sit in judgment on my people,' said Oireal, when he had listened to the words of the chief of the council. And the chief waxed angry, and answered quickly:

'Not one clod of earth shall ever be yours if this day you do not take on yourself the vows that were taken by the king your father.'

Then spake Iarlaid, the younger, and he said: 'Let one half be yours, and the other give to me; then you will have fewer people to rule over.'

'Yes, I will do that,' answered Oireal.

After this, one half of the men of the land of Lochlann did homage to Oireal, and the other half to Iarlaid. And

they governed their kingdoms as they would, and in a few years they became grown men with beards on their chins; and Iarlaid married the daughter of the king of Greece, and Oireal the daughter of the king of Orkney. The next year sons were born to Oireal and Iarlaid; and the son of Oireal was big and strong, but the son of Iarlaid was little and weak, and each had six foster brothers who went everywhere with the princes.

One day Manus, son of Oireal, and his cousin, the son of Iarlaid, called to their foster brothers, and bade them come and play a game at shinny in the great field near the school where they were taught all that princes and nobles should know. Long they played, and swiftly did the ball pass from one to another, when Manus drove the ball at his cousin, the son of Iarlaid. The boy, who was not used to be roughly handled, even in jest, cried out that he was sorely hurt, and went home with his foster brothers and told his tale to his mother. The wife of Iarlaid grew white and angry as she listened, and thrusting her son aside, sought the council hall where Iarlaid was sitting.

‘Manus has driven a ball at my son, and fain would have slain him,’ said she. ‘Let an end be put to him and his ill deeds.’

But Iarlaid answered:

‘Nay, I will not slay the son of my brother.’

‘And he shall not slay my son,’ said the queen. And calling to her chamberlain she ordered him to lead the prince to the four brown boundaries of the world, and to leave him there with a wise man, who would care for him, and let no harm befall him. And the wise man set the boy on the top of a hill where the sun always shone, and he could see every man, but no man could see him.

Then she summoned Manus to the castle, and for a whole year she kept him fast, and his own mother could not get speech of him. But in the end, when the wife of Oireal fell sick, Manus fled from the tower which was his prison, and stole back to his own home.

For a few years he stayed there in peace, and then the wife of Iarlaid his uncle sent for him.

‘It is time that you were married,’ she said, when she saw that Manus had grown tall and strong like unto Iarlaid. ‘Tall and strong you are, and comely of face. I know a bride that will suit you well, and that is the

daughter of the mighty earl of Finghaidh, that does homage for his lands to me. I myself will go with a great following to his house, and you shall go with me.'

Thus it was done; and though the earl's wife was eager to keep her daughter with her yet a while, she was fain to yield, as the wife of Iarlaid vowed that not a rood of land should the earl have, unless he did her bidding. But if he would give his daughter to Manus, she would bestow on him the third part of her own kingdom, with much treasure beside. This she did, not from love to Manus, but because she wished to destroy him. So they were married, and rode back with the wife of Iarlaid to her own palace. And that night, while he was sleeping, there came a wise man, who was his father's friend, and awoke him saying: 'Danger lies very close to you, Manus, son of Oireal. You hold yourself favoured because you have as a bride the daughter of a mighty earl; but do you know what bride the wife of Iarlaid sought for her own son? It was no worldly wife she found for him, but the swift March wind, and never can you prevail against her.'

'Is it thus?' answered Manu. And at the first streak of dawn he went to the chamber where the queen lay in the midst of her maidens.

'I have come,' he said, 'for the third part of the kingdom, and for the treasure which you promised me.' But the wife of Iarlaid laughed as she heard him.

'Not a clod shall you have here,' spake she. 'You must go to the Old Bergen for that. Mayhap under its stones and rough mountains you may find a treasure!'

'Then give me your son's six foster brothers as well as my own,' answered he. And the queen gave them to him, and they set out for Old Bergen.

A year passed by, and found them still in that wild land, hunting the reindeer, and digging pits for the mountain sheep to fall into. For a time Manus and his companions lived merrily, but at length Manus grew weary of the strange country, and they all took ship for the land of Lochlann. The wind was fierce and cold, and long was the voyage; but, one spring day, they sailed into the harbour that lay beneath the castle of Iarlaid. The queen looked from her window and beheld him mounting the hill, with the twelve foster brothers behind him. Then she said to her husband: 'Manus has returned with his twelve foster brothers. Would that I could put an end to him and his murdering and his slaying.'

'That were a great pity,' answered Iarlaid. 'And it is not I that will do it.'

'If you will not do it I will,' said she. And she called the twelve foster brothers and made them vow fealty to herself. So Manus was left with no man, and sorrowful was he when he returned alone to Old Bergen. It was late when his foot touched the shore, and took the path towards the forest. On his way there met him a man in a red tunic.

'Is it you, Manus, come back again?' asked he.

'It is I,' answered Manus; 'alone have I returned from the land of Lochlann.'

The man eyed him silently for a moment, and then he said:

'I dreamed that you were girt with a sword and became king of Lochlann.' But Manus answered:

'I have no sword and my bow is broken.'

'I will give you a new sword if you will make me a promise,' said the man once more.

'To be sure I will make it, if ever I am king,' answered Manus. 'But speak, and tell me what promise I am to make.'

'I was your grandfather's armourer,' replied the man, 'and I wish to be your armourer also.'

'That I will promise readily,' said Manus; and followed the man into his house, which was at a little distance. But the house was not like other houses, for the walls of every room were hung so thick with arms that you

could not see the boards.

'Choose what you will,' said the man; and Manus unhooked a sword and tried it across his knee, and it broke, and so did the next, and the next.

'Leave off breaking the swords,' cried the man, 'and look at this old sword and helmet and tunic that I wore in the wars of your grandfather. Perhaps you may find them of stouter steel.' And Manus bent the sword thrice across his knee but he could not break it. So he girded it to his side, and put on the old helmet. As he fastened the strap his eye fell on a cloth flapping outside the window.

'What cloth is that?' asked he.

'It is a cloth that was woven by the Little People of the forest,' said the man; 'and when you are hungry it will give you food and drink, and if you meet a foe, he will not hurt you, but will stoop and kiss the back of your hand in token of submission. Take it, and use it well.' Manus gladly wrapped the shawl round his arm, and was leaving the house, when he heard the rattling of a chain blown by the wind.

'What chain is that?' asked he.

'The creature who has that chain round his neck, need not fear a hundred enemies,' answered the armourer. And Manus wound it round him and passed on into the forest.

Suddenly there sprang out from the bushes two lions, and a lion cub with them. The fierce beasts bounded towards him, roaring loudly, and would fain have eaten him, but quickly Manus stooped and spread the cloth upon the ground. At that the lions stopped, and bowing their great heads, kissed the back of his wrist and went their ways. But the cub rolled itself up in the cloth; so Manus picked them both up, and carried them with him to Old Bergen.

Another year went by, and then he took the lion cub and set forth to the land of Lochlann. And the wife of Iarlaid came to meet him, and a brown dog, small but full of courage, came with her. When the dog beheld the lion cub he rushed towards him, thinking to eat him; but the cub caught the dog by the neck, and shook him, and he was dead. And the wife of Iarlaid mourned him sore, and her wrath was kindled, and many times she tried to slay Manus and his cub, but she could not. And at last they two went back to Old Bergen, and the twelve

foster brothers went also.

‘Let them go,’ said the wife of Iarlaid, when she heard of it. ‘My brother the Red Gruagach will take the head off Manus as well in Old Bergen as elsewhere.’

Now these words were carried by a messenger to the wife of Oireal, and she made haste and sent a ship to Old Bergen to bear away her son before the Red Gruagach should take the head off him. And in the ship was a pilot. But the wife of Iarlaid made a thick fog to cover the face of the sea, and the rowers could not row, lest they should drive the ship on to a rock. And when night came, the lion cub, whose eyes were bright and keen, stole up to Manus, and Manus got on his back, and the lion cub sprang ashore and bade Manus rest on the rock and wait for him. So Manus slept, and by-and-by a voice sounded in his ears, saying: ‘Arise!’ And he saw a ship in the water beneath him, and in the ship sat the lion cub in the shape of the pilot.

Then they sailed away through the fog, and none saw them; and they reached the land of Lochlann, and the lion cub with the chain round his neck sprang from the ship and Manus followed after. And the lion cub killed all the men that guarded the castle, and Iarlaid and his wife also, so that, in the end, Manus son of Oireal was crowned king of Lochlann.

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