

The White Hound of the Mountain

Cu' Ba'n an t-Shleibhe

by unknown Author,

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There was once a king whose wife died. Before she died, she laid injunctions (geasa) on the king that no man, woman or child should enter her chamber, save the king alone, until she had been a year and a day in the grave. This he promised to fulfil.

Once while the king was gone a hunting, as was his custom every day, his three daughters found the key to the lock which was upon the door of the forbidden chamber, opened it and entered.

The eldest daughter sat down in the chair of her mother, and taking hold of the white blossoms by her side said: „I beseech God and the marvel of this chair

that the son of the king of the western world may come and marry me.“ Then fell the blossom from her hand. The second daughter did the same thing and wished that the son of the eastern world should marry her.

But the youngest daughter would not do it, as she desired to follow her father's advice. However, her sisters forced her to sit down in the chair. Then she said: „I beseech God and the marvel of the chair that the White Hound of the Mountain may come and marry me“. She said this in anger, for she knew not whether anything like the White Hound of the Mountain really existed.

That same afternoon who should come in his coach but the son of the king of the western world, who carried off the eldest daughter with him. Likewise the son of the king of the eastern world came and carried off the second daughter.

When the father came home, the youngest daughter told him what had happened and asked him whether there was anyone called the White Hound of the Mountain. He said there was. „It can't be helped“, said she, „we must put up with God's will.“

On the morrow the White Hound was at the door with his horse and coach, come to marry the girl. She went with him and lived with him until she was with child. Then she asked to be allowed to go home to bring forth the child. He was not pleased that she should go, but at last he gave her permission.

She brought forth a daughter, a beautiful child with a golden circlet on her forehead and a silver one on the back of her head. The mother was faint and left her maid to look after the child. She was not long watching it, when something came down the chimney and snatched away the child. On the morrow came the White Hound and took his wife away, and they lived together until she again went home and brought forth a second daughter.

Again two hands came down the chimney and snatched the child away. The White Hound came as before, took his wife with him and lived with her till she was with child once more. She asked permission to go home, and the White Hound said that she might go, but he would not again come to meet her.

She went home and this time brought forth a beautiful boy with a golden circlet in front of his head and a silver one behind. Then her two sisters came home without any covering on them. When they saw her and her jewels they were very sullen. At last they took her out into the wood, stripped all her dress off her and were going to beat her when they heard a terrible thunder and a roaring coming towards them as if the trees were crashing against one another. Who was there but the White Hound of the Mountain. He beat them till they were nigh dead. He was going to depart, without saying a word to his wife; but she said that since God had granted her the sight of him, she would follow him while she was able to walk.

Then she followed him till the night fell. The White Hound told her to go into a small house by the side of the road; he would wait for her till morning. As she entered the house, the goodwife bade her welcome and prepared a meal for her. She ate till she was satisfied. Then she sat down by the fire.

A beautiful little girl was playing on the floor with a ball of gold and a hurling-stick of silver. On her forehead was a golden circlet, and on the back of her head one of silver. She came and put her head in the woman's lap and fell asleep. Thereupon the woman of the house put them to sleep together. When she rose on the morrow and made ready to go, the woman said it was no good for her to try to come up with the White Hound of the Mountain, but she gave

her a small comb saying it might yet be of some use to her. Then she went forth.

When the White Hound saw her, he began to run, and she followed him. They did not stop running till night. Then her husband told her to go into a small house by the roadside, and he would wait for her till morning.

In the house she again saw a pretty little girl playing with a golden ball and a silver hurling-stick, and having the golden and silver circlets on her head. The girl put her head on her lap and fell asleep.

In the morning the woman of the house gave her a small pair of scissors saying she might find them of some use. She followed her husband, and at night entered a small hut, where she found a pretty little lad playing &c., as before.

She got a small needle from the goodwife. Before she left, she asked who had deprived the little boy of one eye. They tried to turn her off with some story. Then the woman took the eye from her pocket, and it sprang into its proper place, the boy being as sound as ever.

Setting forth again she came up with the White Hound, who said her following him was no good; for he would never again bestow a glance upon her, as she had been the cause of all this and if she had staid with him and brought forth the children in his own house that the spells (geasa) would have left him. She had not gone far that day when she came to a small knoll, into which the White Hound went. She caught hold of the front of his shirt and left four stains of blood on it. The knoll closed on him, and she was turned into a large stone.

There she remained for seven years, when she came to herself. She went forward till she came to the steward's house. He asked her what had happened to her, and she told him. He advised her not to stay there, for a hideous old hag, who was dwelling in the knoll was used to kill everyone that stayed there. She said she (i.e. the old hag) had not killed the White Hound, but had married him, and that he was still dwelling there, and she should like to see him.

Not long after a girl who was with the old hag came out with a shirt to wash it in a lake that was there. In answer to her question the girl told her it was her master's shirt, and that there were four blood stains on it, which two hundred girls who were with the old hag had been unable to take out, wherefore they had been killed by the old hag. The woman went with the girl to the lake, and as soon as she put her hand on the shirt, the stains vanished. She told the girl to tell the old hag that a crow had flown past, carrying the hand of a dead person in its beak, that the hand had fallen down on the shirt and had taken the blood out.

When the girl told this to the old hag, she rejoiced; for she thought that the wife of the White Hound was dead and that that had been one of her hands. On the morrow Maol-Charrach (this was the name of the girl, and the old hag was called Cúl-Carrach) went to the steward's house. The wife of the White Hound put the little comb on her head, which caused the most beautiful hair ever seen to grow on her.

When she came home, Cúl-Carrach told her to ask the woman what she would take for the comb. On the next day Maol-Charrach again went eastward to the steward's house, and in answer to her question the woman said: „Tell her that I will give it for sleeping a night with her husband.“ This was granted to her. And she pulled out the scissors and put them to her tattered little coat, and in a moment she was covered with jewels (silk?) and satin.

Then she went home, &c. The old hag wanted to know the price of the scissors. „A night with her husband“, was the answer.

„Ah, ah“, said the old hag, „I shall grant her that, but it is little good to her.“ And that night the woman slept with the White Hound.

On the morrow the girl came again to the steward's house. The wife of the White Hound put her needle to the silk dress, and little spots of gold and silver came out over the whole dress from top to bottom. Again she demanded to sleep a night with the White Hound as the price of the needle. The old hag granted her this, as she thought it would bring her little good.

That day, when the White Hound was hunting, his huntsman said he would tell him something if he would not be angry with him. The White Hound said he would not, whereupon the huntsman said: „When we were sleeping last night and the night before that (for the huntsman slept in a chamber above his master), a woman was with you and told you everything that had happened to you when you were married in Ireland. But you never heard a word of it, on account of the sleeping-draught which the old hag had given you to drink. And if you will take my advice, we will make a small leathern bag, and tonight when she comes in with the drink, pour it down into the bag which shall be round your neck. But whatever you will see, do not stir. She will then put a candle to the soles of your feet and burn them to the bone, but do not stir, whatever you may see.“

When they (the White Hound and his wife) went to sleep, the old hag came in and gave the Hound a draught. He asked her to get him something out of the kitchen, and while she was below, he poured the drink into his leathern bag, and pretended to fall asleep. But she doubted whether he had drunk it. She burnt the soles of his feet to the bone; but he did not stir. Then she went out thinking he was indeed asleep. The White Hound and his wife then began to converse together, nor did they stop till they were tired. She told him there was an egg at the foot of the bed, and if he hit the old hag with it, he would kill her. It was not long before she came in again. He threw the egg at her and killed her. Then were the spells (geasa) broken, and the castle of the hag and all her possessions now belonged to the White Hound of the Mountain and his wife. The huntsman married Maol-Charrach. They went across the river and were drowned, but I came away sound.

